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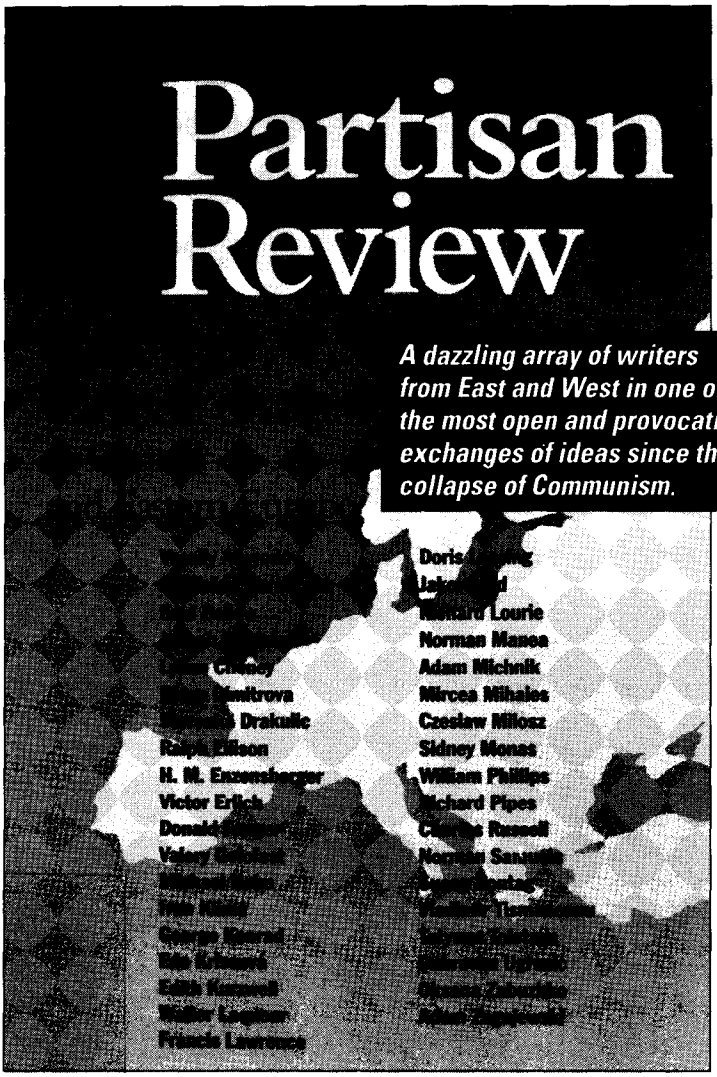

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COMMENT

Irving Howe played a significant role in all our lives. He was one of the dwindling number of survivors of the cultural community better known as the New York Intellectuals. We were an argumentative, strident group, full of talent and passionate conviction. Howe was actually a member of the second generation. And he was an outstanding addition. He was gifted, strong-minded, erudite in literary matters, social issues, politics, and Jewish affairs. He was one of the few remaining members of that endangered species, the man of letters (written about so acutely by John Gross) or what was recently called the literary and political intellectual.

Except for an interlude in the sixties, when Howe, embattled against the arrogant sectarian stupidities of the new left, swung to what would be considered a more conservative position, he was what the French call a man of the left, a socialist – but not a revolutionary one. I did not agree with some of his political stands in recent years, but he clearly opposed the academic onslaught against traditional knowledge and literary achievement. He was simply too intelligent and too well educated to go for the popular academic turn against the past. After all, Howe was himself a large figure in the literary and intellectual tradition. As a literary critic, Howe believed in the primacy of quality and in the cleansing effect of literary judgment. He wrote brilliantly, not preciously but incisively, and he steered clear of the trendy theorizing and jargonized thinking so popular in the academy.

Howe was an indefatigable writer. He wrote for countless magazines and papers. He was the author of many outstanding books on a wide range of literary and social subjects. Aside from *World of Our Fathers*, the best-known are *Politics and the Novel*, *Steady Work*, *The Decline of the New*, and an autobiography, *A Margin of Hope*. He wrote penetrating studies of William Faulkner, Thomas Hardy, and Sherwood Anderson. He edited *Dissent*. He gave innumerable talks. He seemed to be in perpetual intellectual motion. Yet he also appeared to have time for the non-intellectual amenities of ordinary living and for frequently meeting with friends.

As for Howe's politics, he was simply a social democrat, in line with the European social democratic parties – parties of reform within the general framework of capitalism and committed to the concept of a welfare state. Perhaps the closest viable version of European social democracy in this country would be a genuine liberalism – free of the knee-jerk radicalism often infecting it. Recently, Howe seemed to indicate that his socialism was more a moral statement than a programmatic politics.

Editor's Note: These remarks first appeared, in slightly different form, on May 14, 1993, in *The Forward*.

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I've often wondered why Howe clung to the idea of social democracy, though he called it socialism. It is true it can no more be proven that socialism can never work or come into being than, as Sidney Hook pointed out years ago when I was a philosophy student of his, it can be proven that God does not exist. Still, after the terrible experience and demise of Communism, in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it is unlikely that socialism will be tried in the future. As for Howe's persistent belief in such a possibility, I can only guess that he became the captive of his own disciples and his constituents.

In addition to his literary and political writing, Howe was deeply involved in Jewish matters. *World of Our Fathers* was a monumental work, and his pieces on the Holocaust had a kind of moral grandeur. But he was haunted by the question of why our intellectual community, particularly in the pages of *Partisan Review*, had paid so little attention to the Holocaust in the early forties. He phoned me before he wrote his memoir and asked me to have lunch with him. He wanted to know why we had failed to respond more strongly to the gravity of events. He asked me why we had written and talked so little about the Holocaust at the time it was taking place. Neither of us knew the proper answer, but we tended to believe that our residue of Marxist thinking and our preoccupation with the nature of World War Two – was it an imperialist war or not? – distracted us from the mind-shattering slaughter of European Jewry.

Despite our differences in recent years, I've always had a good deal of fondness and an enormous intellectual respect for Howe. I first met him back in the late forties when he began to write reviews for *Partisan Review*. I recall particularly his coming to the office one day with a review, I believe, of a book about Sherwood Anderson. We went over his review line by line. He was unusually bright, quick to grasp, eager, sensible, respectful, ambitious – no show of bohemian arrogance or petulance. It was already clear he would become a leading thinker. Over the years, we became friends, though there were ups and downs. When he zigged, I zagged, and vice versa. His outstanding characteristic, I would say, was his unshakeable seriousness. He had little patience for small talk or cheap gossip. He was impressively articulate, fast on the verbal trigger, provocative, a formidable polemicist. The only one I can recall who bested him was Philip Rahv, who once wrote that Howe was a much better political writer than literary critic. Howe argued back but not very strongly. I could never figure out why he let Rahv have the last word. Usually, Howe did not so easily let go of an intellectual stand or sense of himself.

Some years ago, when we were both on a panel, I apparently said something that suggested I no longer believed in socialism. Howe, who

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was sitting next to me, leaned over and whispered, "William, you aren't a socialist?" – as though he couldn't believe I had fallen so low. I guess I was overwhelmed by Howe's questioning of my moral credentials and by the prevailing temper of the time, so I said yes, I was a socialist. This was a long time ago.

Howe was both a skeptic and a believer, which, I take it, is a mark of a true intellectual, though he recently had an excess of faith. Nevertheless, he was one of our outstanding intellectual figures, in the adversary tradition – a welcome ally and a fierce opponent.

Histories of the Left Three more books have appeared dealing with the history of the left in America: *The Rise and Fall of the American Left* by John Patrick Diggins (W. W. Norton), *The Responsibility of Intellectuals: Selected Essays on Marxist Traditions in Cultural Commitment* by Alan Wald (Humanities Press), and *V. F. Calverton: Radical in the American Grain* by Leonard Wilcox (Temple University Press). They treat different aspects of the subject, and each has its own merits and flaws. Diggins's book, especially, has much valuable information. But what I find most significant is the respect with which they write about the thirties. And, though they are critical of the Soviet Union and the Communists, they all advocate the extension of the earlier radicalism. Wald even looks to a renaissance of working-class writing. This piety toward the radical past is especially odd when one considers the collapse of the Communist system and Communist dreams in the former Soviet Union and the former occupied satellites. We might recall Auden's reference to the thirties as a "low, dishonest decade."

Apparently, ideology is not at an end. How else can we understand the disparity between the collapse of the utopian idea and the clinging to it by many academics? As an explanation, I have suggested the hold on the liberal imagination since the French Revolution of the idea of the moral superiority of the left. But this leaves unanswered the question of why this hold has persisted. It has occurred to me that there might be another explanation. Perhaps the faithful and the orthodox have never experienced intimately the actual Communist movement. It is noteworthy that anti-Communism has been exceptionally strong among former Communists. This even has led to the labeling of some of them as reactionary by the leftists who have been impervious to historical change.

This direct experience would of course explain why there are so few Marxists in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe. Nadezhda Mandelstam, in her monumental memoir, *Hope Against Hope*, for exam-

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ple, makes tragically clear the despair and hopelessness almost every Russian felt under the brutal Stalinist rule. One observation in her book is particularly striking. Mandelstam's reference to the Moscow Trials, which stood out in America as a dramatic illustration of Soviet political genocide, is mentioned in passing, in lowercase, as an event no different from the daily arrests and trials and confessions.

My own experience, which was far less dramatic and lasted only two years, because it took place in this country, was an eye-opener that could not be concealed by propaganda or faith. It seems worth recalling, because I am one of the few anti-Communists in America who were able to observe the inner workings of the Communist Party.

It was in the thirties, just after I had gotten out of college, that I joined the John Reed Writers Club, an organization controlled by the Communist Party. Like many other writers and intellectuals, I was propelled into the radical movement by the Depression, which eroded one's faith in the existing system. It was like a tidal wave that carried people into a new world, full of promises of a better life. But it did not take long for anyone with any independence of mind to see that the Party and the people it influenced – and the movements surrounding it – constituted an historical fraud. The John Reed Club actually was run by a small fraction of Party members, about five or ten people. The rest of the club consisted of vaguely leftist writers who accepted the lead of the Communists, but many of them were cynical and disenchanted. The line of the club was utterly sectarian, not only reflecting the political direction imposed by the Russians, but also imitating the literary tone of the Russians, who dismissed as bourgeois all the leading trends of modern thought and literature. The John Reed Club generally supported the idea of proletarian literature emanating from Moscow. One incident was typical. At a meeting of the club someone read several letters by the Scottsboro boys, who were accused of having raped several women in a railroad boxcar. "I ain't never jazzed anyone," said one of the letters, "I ain't jazzed no one." At this, another member rose and said, "This is proletarian literature." Despite the efforts of some recent apologists to "nativize" the Communists, it was clear that not only the John Reed Club but the entire movement was not indigenous, and thus it had little organic relation to the American people.

After about a year, the directive came from Moscow to establish the "Popular Front," ostensibly a less sectarian policy, but actually a maneuver to attract people who were not Communists but who would not oppose or criticize them too seriously. In its wake the John Reed Clubs were dissolved, and the spurious League of American Writers was set up in their place. For reasons I have never been able to fathom, I had been occasionally permitted into inner circles, though I never joined the Party.

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Perhaps it was because the Party was more lax in those days. Hence I attended a meeting at which a leading member of the Cultural Section pointed to a document in his pocket, outlining the new line which he had brought from Moscow, dissolving the John Reed Clubs in favor of casting a wider net for possible followers. As a result, there was a mock convention in Chicago, where the John Reed Clubs were buried with ritual invocations of the new line. I went to the convention, as a representative of the New York Club, in a boxcar where we slept on the floor. The main speech presenting the new directive was made by the head of Party publications, a fatherly figure, who looked like a diminutive Oriental drug salesman with a large mustache. He told forbidden stories about Trotsky when he relaxed in his office at the end of the day. So it was with every other facet of Communist activity, strictly controlled by Moscow and transmitted through the obedient leadership in this country.

I soon noticed that Party members, including most leaders as well as rank-and-filers, never read any opposition literature – neither Socialist, Lovestonite, nor Trotskyite. And of course all criticism of the Communists was lumped under the dual heading of "Trotskyist and reactionary." For example, when I asked some Communists I knew, who worked on *The Daily Worker*, the official Party newspaper, why they never read the opposition press, they looked at me blankly. What was in their heads, I didn't know. But I guessed that I challenged the stability of their lives. "Where would one go politically if one broke?" was a common question that kept even doubters in the fold.

One day I was asked up to the ninth floor of the Party headquarters on Thirteenth Street, to meet with one of the theoretical leaders. The ninth floor was the famous headquarters of the top functionaries. It was appropriately dingy and poorly furnished. My interrogator was a boyish-looking man of about thirty, who was considered an expert in Marxist theory. I never knew what his expertise consisted of: indeed, he seemed like an autodidact – a common phenomenon in the movement. But he was bright and friendly, and very personable. He said to me quite bluntly that he had heard I was expressing my doubts about the Party to ordinary rank-and-filers, and he asked me to restrict my criticism to leaders of the Party – who, apparently, could shake it off more easily. The Party's level of discourse was shallow and narrow, because independent thought was forbidden. Its theoreticians improvised variations on the official line. The leading theoretician, a short, plump, round-faced, heavily goggled functionary, had no professional training or knowledge, as he parroted Soviet doctrine. And it was rumored that he sometimes used seduction as an assist on hesitant women. He also had just enough brashness, that came with his official position, to impress fellow-traveling celebrities, who

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apparently were ready to be indoctrinated.

I, myself, once became a victim of the prevailing notion that Marxism was a substitute for knowledge of any field, when I wrote a piece on the principle of indeterminacy in physics for one of the Party publications. Sidney Hook, with whom I was taking graduate courses in philosophy, said the effort was amateurish and that I should stick to literary matters.

The intellectual poverty of the Communists seems to have spread to the entire radical movement, for the general intellectual level even among individuals and organizations who were critical of the Party was also low. Yet the theoretical contributions of these early periods are overestimated by Diggins, Wald, and Wilcox. Thus V. F. Calverton, the editor of the dissident *Marxist Quarterly*, who, however much he might be praised in Wilcox's biography for not toeing the Communist line, was distinguished mostly for his idea of American "exceptionalism," which meant simply that Marxism was to be applied in this country less mechanically and with more attention to native traditions. The Lovestonites, one of the principal opposition movements to the Stalinists, also subscribed to a theory of American exceptionalism, and the Trotskyites spent much of their time exposing the lies in Stalinist history and quibbling over Marxist doctrine. Max Eastman, another dissident, and a fairly conventional and rather superficial literary critic, was exposed by Sidney Hook in a series of polemics about the dialectic and other fundamentals of Marxism, as not being a very complex thinker. One exception was John Dewey, but he admitted little knowledge of Marxism and was considered a leftist mostly because of his association with Sidney Hook. Even Hook, one of the few first-rate minds on the left in the very early thirties, took part in some of the hair-splitting Marxist debates, before he broke completely with the Party around 1934. The provincialism of both the official left and some of its critics was highlighted by the contrasting range and depth of the contributions in *Partisan Review* after it started to come out in 1937 as an independent, anti-Communist journal.

I've often wondered why so many remained in the fold, after I and my colleague Philip Rahv broke with the Communists. It was not easy, as we were vilifed and shunned. We were called imperialists, reactionaries, literary snakes, and banned from some publications – like *The Nation* – for which we had been writing, and also blacklisted in other places. To be sure, the nineties are not the thirties or the sixties. The left is not Stalinist today. But many extreme notions and movements owe their credibility to the idea that they are part of the continuity of the radical tradition – and to the persistent hunger for ideology. No doubt, many of its supporters also are tied by friendships, jobs, and intellectual habits. **W. P.**

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A Visit to the Theater In their time, the shock value of the premiere of Alban Berg's *Lulu* was to prostitution, and Jack Gelber's *The Connection* was to psychedelic experience, what the first of two parts of Robert Kushner's *Angels in America* has been to AIDS. But it is difficult to compare the three works on a number of other dimensions: Berg's new music and Gelber's realism were the essential shockers for the bourgeoisie; prostitution and drugs never became a cause, and as a rule had been kept more or less in the closet, while they now are familiar issues to all members of society. In fact, Berg focused on prostitution rather than syphilis, Gelber on addiction rather than its consequences, whereas Kushner, whose bourgeois audience is beyond shocking about homosexuality as such, has zeroed in on the consequences, that is on AIDS, for shock value. And while in Berg's time, though already less so in Gelber's, audiences did not yet expect the messages to be so explicitly spelled out, Kushner, wishing to reach a large audience (on a limited budget), felt he had to make his pitch more directly. To that end, he wrote a most amusing, though occasionally offensive, script about today's plague – a parallel he brings in, for instance, by having the dying man's ancestor appear in his dreams, who informs him of his own end due to "fornication" rather than "sodomy." Of course, I'm not talking here about the quality of the play, or how well it works, but only about its cultural location.

To make fun while a man is dying of AIDS at center stage, and who is not pontificating or whining but emoting and hallucinating while on a hospital bed and receiving transfusions and drugs, and facing death as "Everyman" might face it everywhere, is quite a theatrical accomplishment. To do so while also managing to instruct a straight public about the dilemmas encountered by the different "types" of homosexuals, their constant or changing tastes in love, their hates and prejudices – which may or may not be rooted in their sexuality per se, but in their early habits, and their humanity – is an extraordinary feat.

On the night after the opening, about seventy-five percent of the audience was gay. Clearly, this fact in itself must have accounted for the frequent and resounding applause, for the ebullient laughter at in-jokes, at the absurdities and *double entendres* that inevitably accompany the meetings among declared and in-the-closet gays, their assumed postures toward each other, to straights, and to themselves. That the play itself vindicates the lifestyle, and that no mainstream critic will dare give a bad review for fear of appearing homophobic, assures its commercial success. However, even though the play is imbued with a leftist sensibility, and at times makes sure to bring this home most of all via the fictionalization of Senator McCarthy's henchman, Roy Cohn, who has a direct line to the

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then-President Ronald Reagan, Kushner also pokes fun at some of the leftist antics of the other characters. The lib-lab and nonstop perambulations, pieties and guilt, for instance, of the Jewish lover who callously leaves his WASP friend to die alone, are put down admirably by the black male nurse in drag.

To be honest, I *was* shocked a few times. For I still believe that some things, such as anal intercourse (whatever the participants' sexual orientation), the intimate processes of hospital procedures, and dying, are private matters; and I didn't quite understand the applause at what primarily should have been moving experiences to the intellectual, gay couple who sat behind me. To admit such a retrograde attitude, and to refer to taste, will brand me a conservative and a prude. Should I plead here that just like one of the characters in the play, "I too am allowed a bit of political incorrectness"? I don't think I need to. Instead, I believe that even in our so-called postmodern age we might leave some things unsaid and some experiences off-limits – if only to spark the imagination of the audience to introspection rather than raucous laughter, to admire the sensibility of a performance rather than its light and sound effects. These effects, by the way, were shocking and stunning in their own way. (I can't help but draw a parallel between the allusive treatment of child abuse and prostitution in the recent Italian film *Il ladro dei bambini* and the vulgar takes on the theme in the various Amy Fisher spectaculars: the former sensitive, insightful comment on our culture will remain a classic whereas the latter, a manifestation of our culture's appetite for shock and scandal, will soon be forgotten.)

Yes, in the past the bourgeoisie would have gotten "epatéed." By now, however, the amalgam between art and entertainment is total, and the bourgeoisie has become inured to shock: it takes *all* performances in stride, wears its leftist credentials on its sleeve, and expresses their approval of them in resounding applause. Its members probably made up most of the other twenty-five percent of the *Angels* audience, to judge by the stretch limousines that were waiting on Forty-eighth Street after the performance.

E. K.

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RONALD RADOSH

On Irving Howe

Irving Howe was one of our greatest intellects, a man of passion and intelligence who epitomized the now-lost world of the 1930s and 1940s "New York Intellectuals," a term he himself coined in a 1968 essay. He was by profession a literary critic, who wrote about Celine and Emerson, and of course, the world of the Yiddish community in which he grew up, and from which he brought the world's attention to a then-unknown Isaac Bashevis Singer. But Howe was also a student of culture who could not separate himself from the turmoil of his own world. As he once put it, the socialist movement was his school and his university. He grew up in its milieu and, until his recent death, never left its ranks.

Future biographers will eventually give us a full picture of Howe's life. But it is not too early to set out some thoughts about his accomplishments and failures. Howe, of course, tried to do this himself, in his 1982 autobiography, *A Margin of Hope*. Herein he presented his own estimate of the meaning of his life's course. As usual with Howe, there is much wisdom to be found in its pages. Howe understood, as so many of his contemporaries did not, that in the search for utopia lay the seeds of the totalitarian mentality. Writing about the Spanish Civil War, Howe reflected on the dire fact that it was a group of brave and idealistic young American Communists who went to fight for the Loyalist regime, while others temporized. But in so doing, they became pawns of Stalin's secret police, which revealed to Howe "the tragic character of those years: that the yearning for some better world should repeatedly end in muck, foul play, and murder."

After a youthful Trotskyism and a political baptism in the sectarian world of the late Max Shachtman's Worker's Party and Independent Socialist League, Howe was to settle into the less dogmatic and more open world of moderate social democracy. Indeed, he would often say to me, in my own dogmatic socialist phase as a member of Michael Harrington's Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and later Democratic Socialists of America, "Why do you and the others have to call yourselves socialists? Isn't social democracy enough for America, indeed, isn't that but a remote possibility?" These words, it turned out, were similar to what Elliot Cohen of *Commentary* had said to Howe in the

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early fifties, when Cohen told him that whatever kind of revolutionary Howe thought himself to be, he really had a "social-democratic temperament." It was, Howe remembered, one of those transforming moments of recognition that he had long resisted. And to his successors, he tried, sometimes fruitlessly, to impart this same message.

In the new postwar world, having left the Leninist sects of his youth, Howe founded *Dissent*, which was to become his final legacy to the world. It was in its pages, as well as in those of *Partisan Review* in the 1950s – a decade, Howe wrote, of "suffocating complacency" – that he was to make his mark. The very introduction of his journal made a point he had made in these pages: America had to come out of an "age of conformity," wherein Howe warned intellectuals against accepting the entrapments of power and thereby abandoning their function as intellectuals. Unlike others around him, Howe warned that the intellectual atmosphere of freedom was "under severe attack," and that meant no temporizing to McCarthyism in any of its manifestations. By tying the intellectual and the journal to the newly emerging civil rights movement and to other currents of change, *Dissent* itself came to symbolize the promise of a new epoch.

At a critical juncture in the early Cold War, Irving Howe realized that for all its imperfections – some of which he most of all was keenly aware of – the West faced a justifiable and serious danger from the Soviet Union. At a time when the bulk of the so-called "left" was still mesmerized by the remnants of the wartime Popular Front in the guise of Henry Wallace's "Progressive" movement, Irving Howe argued time and time again that the fear of Communist power was well founded; that were Stalinism to win, the most precious values of the West would be destroyed. That meant one had to support both the Marshall Plan and the forces of liberal anti-Communism in Europe – precisely those forces which the international left was dubbing the agencies of American imperialism.

It was precisely his anti-Communism, however, which allowed Howe to respond forcefully at yet another critical juncture: the birth of the 1960s New Left. Howe and his associates had worked tirelessly for the reemergence of a left rooted in the American democratic culture. But when the New Left rose from the ashes, it reeked of anti-Americanism and a rather crude Marxism, and its young adherents tended to romanticize and support any third world dictatorship whose leaders used the rhetoric of Marxism-Leninism. Howe looked at this New Left and, reflecting on his own generation's bitter experience, saw a new version of the old "after Fascism – us" of the Third Period Communists. In a critical

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and biting essay, "New Styles in Leftism," Howe hit fiercely at the new currents of authoritarian leftism that soon would get the name "radical chic." Here he took on those who abided by the "heritage" of Stalinism which still existed, for those who endorsed the cult of Mao and Fidel, and those who thought that the "wish to shock" was a new form of social revolution.

For these thoughts Howe became anathema to the New Left. At a now-famous meeting in one of those old Workman's Circle lecture halls, Howe debated Tom Hayden, then the young leader of Students for a Democratic Society, author of the Port Huron Statement (the early New Left's manifesto), and spokesman for those who rejected anti-Communism, as Hayden and Staughton Lynd then put it, as "the equivalent of rape." While Howe made his points, Hayden turned pale and stormed out of the hall, indicating by his action that a major rupture had taken place; that the breaking of the tie between the old socialists and the emerging young movement was now complete. For Howe, Tom Hayden and his supporters lacked "historical sense." He was right, and they would never forgive him for the espousal of his principles and for the firmness with which he enunciated them.

Years later, Howe would write that perhaps he had "overreacted, becoming at times harsh and strident," that perhaps he did not have to act in such a contentious fashion towards the New Left. But Howe was right then, and his criticism of the New Left holds up, twenty-five years after the short life span of the movement. And this, indeed, brings me to the path taken by Howe during the last fifteen years of his life. An opponent of Reaganism, he became bitter about what he saw as the new greed prevailing in our culture, and this became somewhat of an obsession. Howe could never resist taking a potshot at the hated neoconservatives, his former comrades who had drifted away from their roots to embrace the new conservative mood. To be fair, they were not too kind to him, either. Writing in *The New Criterion*, Hilton Kramer chastized Howe for clinging to the dream of a socialist project whose time had passed. After all, in Howe's own publication, Robert Heilbroner had acknowledged that it was economic thinkers of the right, Hayek and Von Mises in particular, who had proved more prescient about socialism than any of the left had. And Marxist historians like Eugene Genovese had written – in the journal Howe had come to disdain most, *Commentary* – that socialism had finally "met its Waterloo"; rather than face the meaning of this successful counterrevolution, Genovese wrote, its adherents preferred "to happily dwell on the evil legacy of Ronald Reagan."

That was precisely the path and tone adopted by Howe from the

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1980s on. Kramer, however, was unfair to say that Howe tried to hide his esteem for Trotsky, an accusation that attempted to hint that Howe had supposedly hidden ultra-revolutionary roots. Trotskyism was a ghost Howe had long since abandoned. As he wrote in his short book on Trotsky, Trotskyism had become a "petrified ideology." Yet in his obsessive dislike for his old comrades who turned to the new neoconservatism, Howe could not acknowledge the role played by Reagan in helping along the demise of the Soviet Union, nor give his administration any credit when it was due. Evidently Howe could not see that there was anything to be said in criticism of the inadequacies of the New Deal liberalism that had emerged from conservative circles, nor acknowledge the obvious failure of so many old liberal bromides.

All of this might have been expected. But sadly, Howe also seemed to repudiate many of his old, most basic criticisms that had held up with time. An opponent of American policy in Central America, he could not criticize the Sandinistas when it would have helped, preferring to see them, as he once put it at a *Dissent* meeting, as a "new formulation." He even seemed to believe that it was futile to criticize black support for Communism, since Communists in South Africa and elsewhere fought for black freedom when other whites were silent. That Howe himself had answered these specious arguments years earlier seemed to matter little.

At one point during the Vietnam years, Howe and his comrades had sought a third force – a social movement in Asia and Europe that would provide a way to reject both capitalism and Communism. He worked for the success of such a group in Vietnam, only to find it nonexistent or incapable of gaining political success. The effect was to blind his judgment when it came to an entirely new epoch. Thus, the man who once endorsed Joseph Buttinger's work against both Communist and French imperialism now was saying, as he said to this writer, "I have learned that there is no third force." The implication – for Nicaragua especially – was that one had to choose the Sandinistas. Here, Howe was endorsing the then-conventional wisdom of the very New Left he had earlier rejected. That this put him at odds with his Latin American counterpart, the social democratic poet and writer Octavio Paz, was something he did not mull over. It also had political ramifications for Howe's chosen political course. It enabled him to finally reconcile with those very elements of the New Left that had for so many years wanted nothing to do with him. This was acknowledged in an approving *New Yorker* piece, whose author observed that those former "student radicals grew a little older and saw the value of a more tolerant, less dogmatic, more democratic approach to the remaking of society," and thus Howe was there to now "welcome his young

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critics back." True, perhaps, for a few. But careful readers of *Dissent* could notice many examples of the kind of left-think articles and specious arguments which had been absent in the journal's formative and influential years.

Whatever our differences with Howe's last period, his contributions and his erudition, his thoughtfulness and his commitment to democracy will be sorely missed. Even when he disagreed, as was often, he opened the pages of his journal to that very disagreement. Howe could not allow himself to give up the socialist project. Indeed, he inexplicably reaffirmed it after having himself abandoned it years ago. But in his belief that it was the duty of the intellectual to articulate democratic values, and to reject authoritarianism, he has left us a lasting legacy. Howe knew that the wave of the future was simply democracy, and that to speak on behalf of its ideal could unite conservatives, liberals, and radicals. In a time of new beginnings, when the Cold War has ended and those on opposite sides of the fence are beginning to work together in a new framework and period, that is a legacy still worth cherishing.

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DIANA TRILLING

The Beginning of the Journey

We were in our first year on upper Claremont Avenue near 122nd Street when Lionel began to lie to me and say that he was going to the library when, in fact, he was going to the movies. I am unsure how I found this out; perhaps he eventually confessed it to me. He had frequent recourse to this refuge: like someone unemployed and homeless, he sat through long blinding hours of double features in the movie theaters of Times Square. He was not unemployed; he no longer worked at the *Menorah Journal*, but he had a part-time teaching position in the evening session of Hunter College. Yet in a career which had scarcely begun, he felt defeated, robbed of expectation. His experience of working in the company of Elliot Cohen and Herbert Solow at the *Menorah Journal*, followed by my illness and operations at the hospital in Boston and by his lonely weeks in Cambridge, had taken its toll in confidence. He also had before him, as did his other college friends with literary aspirations, the discouraging example of Kip Fadiman's quick rise to reputation: on the basis of but a small handful of pieces for the *Nation*, Fadiman had already become a known figure, the most enviously noticed critic of his generation. Lionel could have no hope of success such as his. All his life Lionel would suffer from depression. Although as psychological pathologies go, his depression was mild, it was a clinical symptom, a far more troubling phenomenon than mere dejection or downheartedness. For no perceptible reason he would suddenly fall into an extreme bleakness of mood and be unable to function with appropriate spirit. At these times he regarded me as an enemy and acted toward me as if it were I who were the cause of his misery – at the heart of his depression there lay a deep unrecognized anger. No one of his acquaintance and no one with whom he worked outside the home would ever be aware that he suffered these alternations of mood. Except when he was alone with me, he never allowed his depression to show. But even apart from these shifts of mood, he was not to be described as a happy person. Indeed, he thought poorly of happiness and of people who claimed to be happy or desired happiness above other of life's gratifications. He often repeated the question which Philip Rahv would put to one with such gusto. Born in Russia, Rahv had trouble pronouncing the letter *h*. "Oo's 'appy?" he would inquire rhetorically and

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with obvious relish. Lionel would have replied that it was not the serious people of the world. Seriousness was the desirable condition of man, especially literary man. At best, the poet might be amiable, like Keats. The standard to which Lionel held himself as a writer made it virtually inevitable that he should be disappointed by his own performance. Even late in his career, in the face of incontestable achievement, he would feel that he had accomplished little of what he had intended to do and that the little he had done was of only dubious worth. He never kept a conventional diary, but at irregular intervals he recorded his personal journey in a series of untidy notebooks. In one of the notebooks for the year 1952 there is a revealing entry:

> I hear on all sides of the extent of my reputation – which some even call "fame." In England it seems to be very considerable, and even in this country it is something, and in France there is some small trace, etc. At Cambridge someone gave three lectures on me. I contemplate this with astonishment. It is the thing I have most wanted from childhood on – although of course in much greater degree – and now that I seem to have it I have no understanding whatever of its basis – of what it is that makes people respond to what I say, for I think of it as of a simplicity and of a naivete almost extreme.

The only time I knew him to receive a compliment with pleasure, as conventionally one is expected to, was when, though he was himself of course not a Nobel laureate, he was among the guests invited to President Kennedy's Nobel Prize dinner at the White House and was greeted by the President on the receiving line: "Oh, it's you." After the evening's entertainment, we were asked to join a small party in the President and Mrs. Kennedy's quarters. Leaving the White House that night, Lionel was unreservedly happy and for once allowed his assessment of his personal situation to include the right to pleasure.

In the fall of 1930, after a year which would have threatened the firmest self-confidence, there was no doubt that Lionel's circumstances were problematic. He had settled on the topic for his dissertation, but he had scarcely begun the reading he would have to do for it, and he knew that many years of hard work lay ahead of him before he would receive his degree – just how many years even he at his most disheartened would not have predicted. His job in the evening session of Hunter was dull and humiliating, and it offered no prospect of permanence. Even the neighborhood in which we now lived contributed to his discouragement. Upper Claremont Avenue was not then a dangerous neighborhood; as in

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most residential areas of the city, one could walk about even at night without fear of attack. It was not noisy and crowded as it is now. But it was a neighborhood without hope; it promised no future. Our apartment house was more solidly constructed than the building in which we had lived on Bank Street – it was built in a more substantial era – but its blank façade was latticed with water stains and rusting fire escapes which were an invitation to burglars. A few months after we moved into our fifth-floor apartment, we were robbed of all the mementos of my younger life which I had brought with me into marriage: my infant ring with its ruby birthstone, my infant locket and chain, the green enamel lapel watch my father had bought for me at the Paris Exposition of 1925, the old Russian earrings which had once belonged to Lionel's father's grandmother, which he had given me as an engagement present.

Hunter was not new to Lionel; he had been teaching there when we met. At this period in the century it had a questionable reputation: appointments in the college were said to be in the gift of Tammany Hall. The night session in which Lionel was now teaching was even less self-respecting than the day session. Most of the evening students had full-time jobs and came to class weary and unprepared; they were in college not to learn but in the vain hope that merely having a college degree would give them the possibilities denied them in the life into which they had been born. The college faculty was cynical and bored; working in an atmosphere of political patronage, it had lost whatever intellectual energy it might once have brought to the profession of teaching. Teaching in the evening session, one was paid by the hour and not paid if one failed to meet a class. If I remember correctly, Lionel's pay was $3.65 an hour for his undergraduate class and a bit over $5 an hour for his graduate course – graduate classes ran for an hour and a half. Should an insufficient number of students register for a course, the course was dropped. When it looked as if Lionel's graduate course would be undersubscribed, I and two of our friends registered for it; it was worth our investment of $45 to ensure that the course was given. I have often been asked why I have never taught. I did teach, for one evening at Hunter when Lionel was taken ill; we could not afford to lose his evening's pay, and I taught in his stead. I had no problem with his undergraduate course. It was a course in composition, and I read aloud a story by Katherine Mansfield; then we briefly discussed it. His graduate class was what ended my teaching career. The subject that evening was Ruskin. As a student of art history, I had read one or two of Ruskin's essays, but this had provided me with far from a sufficient knowledge to teach him. I planned to read at least one other essay on my ride downtown, but unfortunately I met an old friend on the bus and was prevented from doing this preparation. There were only three students in

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the class. Two were as ill-informed as I, but the third was not only intelligent but probably the best student in the college. Lionel had spoken of her at home. She was also beautiful and, as I had gathered, more than a little attracted to her instructor. She quickly guessed that I was Lionel's wife and that I was ignorant of my subject and set about torturing me. By the end of the evening I had vowed never again to teach.

The economic breakdown in the country was at last becoming real to us. In the Village we had lived at the classless edge of bohemia, nibbling at its seductions. We foolishly supposed that if we rejected the economic authority of the society, we were immune to its dangers. Now it was being borne in upon us that with or without our assent, we were part of the economic and social organization and were to be spared none of its actuality. Lionel's father's fur business had always been precarious, but at its worst he had been able to maintain some kind of footing, however slippery. Now, with the crash of the market, he was unable to meet his rent and modest payroll; the business soon ground to a halt. My father's fate was less predictable but no less extreme. In an expanding economy he had taken a large bank loan to build a new wing to his factory. The market collapsed, and his collateral became worthless. The bank took over his business: my father was removed, and my brother was installed in his place as head of the company. My father's dignity as he confronted the loss of everything he had worked for gave his ruin an added dimension of pathos. For the time that remained to him, he and my sister lived on his paid-up life insurance. The insurance had been meant for his children, and it was painful for him to use it. He felt that the money was not rightfully his. Soon he developed heart disease, and for the next three years he quietly waited for death.

Lionel's family had no paid-up life insurance to live on; his father had taken out his insurance at an unusually late age, and it had not accumulated any cash value. When I first knew Lionel's parents, before the collapse of his father's business, I thought of Lionel's mother and father as essentially timid people, eager to please. Now, in adversity, they seemed to become inordinately self-willed. All our first winter on upper Claremont Avenue, Lionel's father battled with us over his insurance. Neither he nor we had the money with which to meet the premiums, but he was determined to hold on to his policies. We spent similarly futile hours of argument about the disposition of his precious shells, the outer garments of his fur-lined coats. Several dozen of them remained in his inventory. The policies and the shells, the shells and the policies: Lionel's father's celebration of his two assets, as he called them, became the litany of our first year uptown. When he at last yielded to our urging and consented to their sale, it was as if he had yielded on life itself. He began to

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drift into a universe of fantasy that had probably been beckoning him for some time. A first manifestation of the paranoia that would persist and increase throughout the twelve years of life remaining to him was his belief that he was in debt to a porter who had once worked for him in his fur business. Furtively, he appealed to Lionel for money with which to placate this unseen adversary. In the spring of 1931 Lionel took on the support of his family; it was an inevitable next step in his life, like the succession to the throne of a crown prince on the death of his father, the king. Lionel's mother had always looked to a future in which Lionel would replace his father as head of the household; that future had now arrived. Actually, there was no practical alternative to Lionel's assumption of the support of his parents and sister. There were no jobs to be had, and even had there been, his father was not employable. Though his mother was only fifty-five, fifty-five was then thought to be a great age, virtually terminal. Too, she had never worked for a living and with her upbringing could not have imagined herself in even the most genteel employment, such as baby-sitting or being the receptionist in a doctor's office. Lionel undertook to give his family one hundred dollars a month. In his hourly teaching at Hunter, this must have been close to the whole of his earnings. In the next academic year, 1931-32, he had a fellowship at Columbia with a stipend of $1,800. Although usually one was not permitted to work while holding a fellowship, he was allowed to continue with his evening teaching at Hunter because of his family responsibilities. In the fall of 1932 he was made an instructor in the Columbia English Department, with a salary of $2,400. His monthly contribution to his family was now half his salary. It was not enough for his family to live on, and it left us without enough money to live on. There was a short period when my sister squeezed $85 a month out of her household money to help us. Without collateral or cosigners, we were unable to borrow from a bank, but we borrowed from everyone we knew, small frequent sums, usually not more than fifty dollars; occasionally it might have been as much as one hundred dollars. It was a great deal for our friends to lend us. No one charged us interest; our friends had not yet come to think of money as something with which to make more money. Of the people we asked for loans, only Herbert Solow refused us; sounding grandly moral, he said that he would not cooperate in Lionel's self-destruction. What he meant, of course, was Lionel's sacrifice for his parents. Though Solow was alone in refusing us money, he was not alone in thinking that Lionel conspired in creating his financial difficulties. Even our more generous friends felt, and made Lionel feel, that in supporting his parents he was masochistically contriving his own ruin. It seems always to have been Lionel's fate to have his virtues regarded as shortcomings. At the *Menorah*

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Journal Cohen and Solow thought his peaceableness a weakness of character, and when I became phobic and abnormally dependent upon Lionel's being with me, our close friends thought it neurotic of him to sacrifice his freedom as he did in order to stay with me – with the exaggeration which was usual in his pronouncements on marriage, Kip Fadiman assured Lionel that there was only one test of a good marriage, the distance a man could put between himself and his wife.

While the loss of his money and business was bound to alter my father's sense of himself, it never altered his behavior to his children or ours to him. Whatever his private emotions of diminished pride, there was no diminution in the authority he held for us or in the respect we accorded him. But with the loss of their financial independence, the relation of Lionel's mother and father to Lionel and me was forever reversed: we became the parents, they the children. Lionel's father steadily receded into his darkening world. He took no account of how his household was being managed; from time to time he would emerge to ask Lionel for money with which to meet some personal obligation such as a bill for his medications – he lived at the border of addiction, always frightened that his drugs would give out. Lionel's mother made no outright demand for more money than Lionel gave her, but her relation to us was charged with dissatisfaction: the money we gave her was insufficient; she felt that she was not getting her due. The best of Lionel's mother's strength of will in those years was directed to avoiding a change in her standard of living. Lionel had been sent to Columbia rather than City College, where the tuition would have been free; his sister Harriet, now in college, was similarly sent to New York University instead of Hunter. She was not made to work on Saturdays or during vacations. We were never told where the money came from for Harriet's tuition, but her mother's long-cherished diamond rings and diamond brooch, once the property of *her* mother, disappeared, and we surmised that they were sold for that purpose. What was perhaps most extraordinary was that the Trilling household continued to employ a daily maid. To be sure, the pay for a maid in the Depression was only a dollar a day, but one could also feed a family of four on a dollar a day. The fact that it was our money that Lionel's mother was spending made it impossible for us to tell her how she should spend it. Had she been asked to justify the way she handled her domestic affairs, she would almost certainly have said that she had to keep up appearances for Harriet's sake: if Harriet was to make a proper marriage, she must come from a proper middle-class home. And, in fact, once Harriet married, her mother dropped all pretense to a station beyond her means: she happily did her own housework and after her husband died rented out

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their bedroom and herself contentedly slept in the living room. As the years went by, Lionel's mother and I grew close to one another. I came to think of her as a fond and generous parent, much to be relied upon. When I was pregnant and began to miscarry, she stood by me as I cannot suppose that my own mother would have, insisting that I had not lost the baby and helping me to withstand the doctor's opinion that I should have a curettage. How reconcile the woman she became with the woman who in the early years of the Depression had so little heed of us and our needs and difficulties? Throughout our first year uptown Lionel's mother gobbled up Lionel's energies like an ill-conditioned child. At one point the pressure became so great that Henry Rosenthal, in his role of rabbi, intervened with her on Lionel's behalf, reminding her that Lionel was only at the start of his professional life and that she now must give him the peace and freedom to find his way. I, too, pleaded with her to retract some of the greedy demands she put upon Lionel; in response she sternly cautioned me that the one thing she would never forgive me was interfering with Lionel's career. Although it had to be plain that my father no longer had money, Lionel's mother still apparently solaced herself with the idea that I was an heiress and had only to dip into my private reserves for her financial problems to evaporate. It was not uncommon in her time and class to suppose that people had secret legacies or other hidden sources of money. Lionel's mother was always enviously conjecturing of one or another of her women acquaintances that she was "climbing the marble steps." This meant that the woman was secretly squirreling away money from her housekeeping allowance. In the earlier years of this century the private universities took it for granted that their instructors were not financially dependent on their university earnings. When our friend Alan Brown was a young instructor of English at Columbia and asked for a raise because he now had two children in school, his head of department assured him that it was always legitimate to invade capital for the education of one's children, and at Yale this confidence was carried even further. There it was assumed that anyone who taught at Yale must be rich enough to own a boat: one of the senior professors in the Yale English Department, taking leave of a junior colleague at the start of the summer vacation, urged this impecunious young friend of ours to be sure to moor in his harbor should he be cruising off the coast of Maine.

Lionel's mother's Park Avenue relatives had not forgiven Lionel for marrying. Although they were themselves little hurt by the Depression, they made no move to help their sister. They were pleased that the burden of his mother's support had now fallen on Lionel and that the marriage had not permitted him to escape his duty to his family. A few years later, one of the aunts, Aunt Deborah, softened and gave Lionel's mother

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twenty-five dollars a month. She taught school and had her own income. The only other assistance Lionel's mother had from her relatives came, most strangely, from Uncle Louis, the chemistry professor at City College who had been read out of the family when he married a Gentile. He, too, began to give her twenty-five dollars a month – with their steady paychecks, teachers in the city school system had suddenly become people of substance. But Louis's help continued for only a short while: his wife did her own housework, and when she discovered that Lionel's mother had a maid, she put a stop to Louis's contribution. The emotional pressure which his mother put upon Lionel and the constant intrusions upon his time were not the most troubling aspects of his relation with his family during these years of the Depression. Surely the worst feature of the situation was his parents' lack of appreciation of what he was trying to do for them. Lionel's father lived until 1943. For as long as he lived he never spoke a word of gratitude. But his father of course was not the family member who mattered; it was his mother's acknowledgment that he was doing everything he could for her which Lionel wanted and needed. As the years went by, Lionel's mother often spoke in praise of me; she would say that I had been more than a daughter to her. She never said that Lionel had been more than a son, that he had been her mainstay and the mainstay of her household. To thank him would, I suppose, have been to recognize a dependence to which she preferred not to admit.

The part played by Lionel's mother's wish to maintain her place in the middle class is not to be minimized in any account of her behavior in these difficult years. Often there was reason for Lionel to feel that she cared more for the appearance of class than for his well-being. Yet paradoxical as it may seem, it was finally neither money nor social status which was most important to her, but something else, something she called "culture." The world "culture" was often used by her Park Avenue sisters as well, but what it meant to her sisters was going to the Boston Symphony concerts on Thursday afternoons and having the right opinion as to whether Toscanini or Koussevitzky was the better orchestral conductor. By "culture" Lionel's mother meant much the same as Matthew Arnold had meant: the sum of assumptions and ideals which, in the absence of a presiding religious faith, offers us our moral guidance. Without minimizing the tangible advantages of a well-financed membership in the middle class, she gave her ultimate regard to the intangible advantages of learning and high aspiration. In this, she was the superior of her Park Avenue relatives. Lionel was irritated by his mother's invocations of "culture." He felt that she was laying claim to territory which was not hers. But I think he was mistaken and that it was her sincere way of referring to what she most valued in life. There was always less talk of

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money in my family than in Lionel's – my father had more of it. But for my father, too, there was a contradiction between the importance he ascribed to money as proof of worldly success and his scorn when money was offered in evidence of a successful life. More than Lionel's mother, who would always maintain certain of the religious practices in which she had been reared, my agnostic father associated idealism with religion or, more specifically, with being Jewish. He believed that Jews were people of especially high moral purpose, and he took pride in Jewish philanthropies, as in anything which transcended economic self-interest. With this as the teaching of my childhood, it was with troubled amazement that I read an article in *Commentary* during the Reagan years celebrating self-interest as a step-in-progress in the moral and political evolution of the Jews.

In December 1932 my father died, and I inherited a third of the $200,000 insurance trust which was all that remained of his estate. It was inviolable and had not been cashed in like his ordinary policies. The trust was administered by the Guaranty Trust Company; after administrative fees, my share of the principal was something over $60,000. It was a substantial sum for the time. The principal was to be distributed in four quarters at five-year intervals. In the meanwhile, I had the income. If I remember correctly, in the first quarter, while the principal was intact, the income was between two and three thousand dollars, virtually the equivalent of Lionel's salary at Columbia. Even with this boost in our finances, we were unable to meet our expenses: in addition to our obligation to Lionel's parents, we were soon having to pay for psychoanalysis. But now at least we could borrow more widely than before – for the duration of the trust we would owe the whole of each quarterly distribution by the time I received it. My inheritance was not salvation for us, but as I think back upon the situation, it is hard for me to see how we could have managed had we not had it. Lionel did everything in his power to earn extra money, but we were never able to catch up with ourselves. Without my inheritance, he would either have had to find a more lucrative way to supplement his salary as a teacher than the various jobs of writing and editing which he took on – and I cannot imagine what the way could have been – or we would have had to live a very different kind of life, a life of poverty. But a life of poverty is a life of despair. We lived moments of despair but never a life of despair. It was painful for Lionel not to have his mother's gratitude for the help he gave her, yet it would turn out that he was himself unwilling to be grateful for the help we had from my father. We were in middle age when one day we were talking with Elliot Cohen about our early experiences, and I spoke of how important it had been to have my inheritance, how it had given us the financial hand we

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needed when we saw no other means of rescue. Lionel became bitterly angry at me, as if I were crediting my father with the support which he, Lionel – and Lionel alone – had provided. But I was not slighting him; he was slighting my father. For all Lionel's efforts, we would have sunk under the weight of our indebtedness if it had not been for the money my father left me.

On my return from Boston I had resumed my singing lessons, and I practiced every day, or tried to. But the machine had run down; there were days when it refused even to start. I have no recordings of my voice. Recordings could at that time be made only in a professional studio. With Lionel dead, there is now no one who heard me sing when I was singing at my best, and I sometimes ask myself: Did I have enough of a voice to justify my ambition for a professional career in music, or was I pursuing an idle dream? The question is pointless. A voice which cannot be put to professional use is not a professional instrument. I stopped my lessons and have never sung again. In the spring of 1933 we moved into a garden apartment in the East Seventies where I saw my teacher for the last time: I had invited her and the sister with whom she lived to tea. People occasionally know more about the lives of their friends than it is useful for them to know, but perhaps more frequently they know too little. My singing teacher knew nothing of the neurotic problems which were now besetting me and which put an end to any possible career I might have had as a singer. She blinded herself even to the physical threat which had been posed by my illness and operations. Having counted on me to justify her own career as a teacher of voice, she now fitted me into what must have been a heavy history of failed promises and even of professional betrayals. To confirm her belief that when I stopped studying with her I set myself up as a teacher of singing, she asked me slyly that day whether I had many pupils. I replied that I did not teach, but I doubt that she believed me. I am never able to make myself believable where I am not already believed.

Today, I casually use the words "neurotic" and "neurosis" as if they had always had a place in my vocabulary. In 1931 when I experienced my first panic, not only was the language of psychological disorder altogether foreign to me, but I had no idea of what was clinically meant by panic. I had had premonitions of emotional disturbance during the summer of my marriage when we were living in the Rortys' cabin in Westport. I had been on the verge of panic the day that Lionel went with Jim Rorty to fight a neighborhood fire, and there had been forebodings of phobia in my uneasiness when for any reason I was left alone on our Westport hill. But I had not recognized these as signals of trouble to come. It was not until two years later, in the spring of 1931, that I had my first full-blown

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panic. I had gone to bed one night feeling entirely well but restless. While I lay in bed, waiting for sleep, I was all at once overwhelmed with terror. This is to say that I now realize I was in the grip of terror. At the time I would not have thought to describe what I felt as fear – until one learns that terror can take so extravagant a form, one does not readily connect an experience of panic with anything so commonplace. I was unable to speak or move, unable to tell Lionel what was happening to me. I clung to him, praying for release from whatever awful thing had attacked me. Finally, the panic subsided. In my ignorance of psychic illness, I attributed the episode to indigestion: I had perhaps eaten a tainted food whose poison penetrated to my brain. But the attack recurred several times in the next weeks, and I began to be afraid to stay home alone or to go any distance from home without someone with me, preferably Lionel. I could no longer be persuaded that I was suffering from a physical disorder, and I decided to consult a neurologist. Neurology was my closest approach to psychology or psychiatry. It was my bridge between body and mind. The neurologist I consulted was Dr. Israel Wechsler. I think he was recommended by some connection with the *Menorah Journal*. Dr. Wechsler was not a voluble man. He checked my blood pressure and reflexes. Then quietly, almost timorously, conscious of the treacherous waters into which he was heading, he questioned me about my sexual life. Did I have normal sexual desire, normal gratification? I thought him rather silly: even a child of my benighted generation had to wonder how a doctor defined the normal in sexual desire. Dr. Wechsler's next question to me hangs in my mind like a balloon in a comic strip. Why, he asked, did I want Lionel always to be with me? The question implied an element of choice in my symptom, as if I had been presented with a list of fear-provoking conditions from which I had chosen this as the disorder to inflict upon myself. If there was indeed purpose in a symptom, was there not also accusation in bringing the choice to my attention? Vaguely I was annoyed, yet I responded unhesitatingly: I wanted Lionel to be with me because I wanted to be more dependent upon him than he was upon me. I am reporting a conversation of many years ago, and over time I have frequently pondered this reply which I made to Dr. Wechsler. Although even today I am not sure that I fully comprehend what I was saying, I think I do understand what in essence I was revealing about a hidden motive in my burgeoning neurosis. Lionel was little dependent upon me. He was considerably less dependent upon me than most men of my acquaintance are upon their wives. He sought and usually took my advice and, like any partner in a working marriage, he relied on me to be in his corner. He would come to depend upon me for help with his writing, although at the time that I saw Dr. Wechsler this had not yet begun. I was using the

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word "dependent" imprecisely. What I was trying to say was that I wanted Lionel to be more commanding, more in charge of me. I wanted him to be more like my father even if this would involve a curtailment of my freedom – perhaps especially if it curtailed my freedom. I wanted him to be the chaperon my father had been. The fact that he did not exercise parental authority over me exposed me to all the illicitness and temptation I had been taught to fear. If Dr. Wechsler knew what I was revealing to him, he kept it to himself. He prescribed a mild sedative, liquid Luminol.

The Luminol was in my handbag as we traveled to Yaddo several weeks later. I was uneasy about traveling, but it was not yet a phobia. We had been invited to the writers' and artists' retreat in Saratoga for the summer. Officially, I was invited as a singer, but actually I was a marital appendage; no one that summer asked me to sing or spoke to me about singing or even heard me practice. Each of the guests had a studio, and my studio was at a remove from the main house. I had no identity other than as Lionel's wife, and he had little enough professional identity of his own. A place at which writers and painters and musicians pursue their creative work free of cost and free of the responsibilities and interruptions of their usual lives, Yaddo was – and remains – the best-known of these colonies which sprinkle the country. The estate on which it is located had originally belonged to the Spencer Trasks – I think Mr. Trask had been a banker. It was now presided over by Mrs. Elizabeth Ames, a pretty, soft-spoken woman in her early middle age. No one who was at Yaddo the summer that Lionel and I were there spoke either of Yaddo itself or of Mrs. Ames except as mad – not only the writers but whoever could put pen to paper was determined to write a novel about it, with Mrs. Ames as the villainess. Yaddo had known tragedy; the Trask children had died there and were buried on the grounds. But this alone was not what accounted for its eeriness. The guests were housed in the mansion, as it was always spoken of. It was the main house, where the Trasks had themselves lived, and it had apparently been little changed since their occupancy – its decoration attested not only to their wealth but also to their extravagance of taste. The vast central hall was connected to the upper floors by a grand staircase at whose foot stood a huge Russian sleigh. The hall was itself covered with a rug woven to look as if the sun played upon it at all hours of the day, even in the rain. Although some of the upper rooms were still bedrooms, as they had always been, others had been made into workrooms or studios. Frequently their earlier inhabitants had etched their signatures or poetic sentiments into the windows, no doubt with diamonds. For Mrs. Trask life had apparently been a perpetual high-minded house party, and this was the spirit in which Mrs. Ames undertook to run the colony. The guests who were at Yaddo when Lionel and I were there

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would have been model residents in my Radcliffe dormitory. Everyone was quiet-voiced and decorous, prompt to meals, conformable in dress and speech. At dinner we engaged each other in courteous conversation and, when the meal was done, we lingered politely in the central hall over our coffee. In recent decades there has been a stringent retrenchment at Yaddo: services have been drastically reduced, and former guests are solicited for funds to maintain the colony. But in 1931 a stay at Yaddo was for most of us an unprecedented experience of luxury. In addition to a handsome bedroom, each of us had a workroom or studio. Both the house and the grounds were fully staffed, and the food was consistently the best I have ever eaten. There was nevertheless something about the place, perhaps its wish to persuade so motley a group of hopeful writers and artists that they were the houseguests of a dead millionaire, which infected even the servants. One of the elderly waitresses was said to have worked for the Vanderbilts. As she passed a platter of chicken to Lionel one evening at dinner, he lightly inquired whether the chicken was "public or private" – the vegetables which were served to us at Yaddo were grown on the estate, and he was asking whether the estate also raised the chickens. "Public, like Yaddo," the waitress snapped. There was also reason to suppose that the housemaids had the auxiliary function of spying for Mrs. Ames, for how else could she have known that Lionel and I slept in only one of our twin beds or that, oblivious of the rule which forbade our visiting in each other's rooms before four in the afternoon, I had allowed one of the guests, a photographer, to take my picture by the morning light in his studio? Mrs. Ames was hard of hearing and preferred to communicate with the guests by note. A few days after our arrival, Lionel received a note asking if we intended to use our second bed; if not, the maid could be spared the necessity of making two beds. My ill-timed picture-taking brought me two notes in rapid succession. In the first, I was informed that having broken a Yaddo rule, I would have to leave the next day. The second note instructed me that I was to leave by the early afternoon train, "without lunch." The financial appeals which are now sent to former guests of Yaddo contain many reminders of the colony's worthy yesterdays. These include fond recollections of Elizabeth Ames, who was early and long in charge of the colony. No doubt Mrs. Ames changed with the years: I indeed heard that she had a love affair with one of the guests and that she was much altered by it; she became kinder and less suspicious. When Lionel and I knew her, the best that we or any of our fellow-guests would have said of her was that she must be forgiven her behavior because of her sad past. Her young husband had been killed in the First World War.

Lionel and I had our twenty-sixth birthdays at Yaddo; we were not

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children. But professionally we were nowhere. I had no professional commitment of any sort, and although Lionel had published a great deal, more than many of his literary contemporaries, he had not made himself felt in the writing community: nothing he wrote was referred to by other writers, and no one sought him out for any activity connected with the literary life. But there were few of our fifteen or sixteen fellow guests at Yaddo who had as yet advanced far in their careers. The only one who even approached fame was Evelyn Scott, a Southern novelist who had written a much-praised novel, *The Wave*; we could none of us have foreseen that in the next years she would be written out of American literary history as thoroughly as dissidents in Stalin's Russia were written out of Soviet history. Malcolm Cowley, also at Yaddo that summer, had already acquired a modest renown as a poet and critic, and Sidney Hook was beginning to be known as a teacher of philosophy at New York University. Marc Blitzstein was at the start of his career as a composer, and B. H. Haggin had not yet begun his long and distinguished career as the music critic of the *Nation*. Max Lerner had yet to win recognition as a journalist. We were a promising group, not a company of stars. Sassy and provocative, Blitzstein was the most entertaining of the guests. Hook was the most vigorous-minded. Long a student of the philosophy of John Dewey, he had recently become a Marxist. In the course of the summer he converted several of us, including Lionel and me, to Communism.

The thirties made Communists of many Americans, not so much among the working classes in which, with the breakdown of the economy, one might perhaps have expected to find a desire for revolution, but among intellectuals and other members of the opinion-forming classes. In the wake of the stock-market crash, many intellectuals became disaffected from capitalism and turned to Marxism as the remedy for our manifestly faulty system of social and economic organization. It was now no longer a mark of moral superiority for writers and artists to stay aloof from politics; on the contrary, it was imperative that they have political opinions and make them known. To this day we still speak blithely of "card-carrying Communists," as if in the earlier years of this century to have been a dedicated Communist meant that one had to be a member of the Communist Party. Actually, only a small minority, a handful of Communist sympathizers, were Party members. The great majority were fellow travelers, people who in one or another degree were committed to the Communist cause and who, whether they were wholly conscious of it or not, took their direction from the Party but did not submit to its discipline. This was how the Soviet Union wanted it. Even early in the decade, but increasingly as time went on, Stalin was more interested in

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extending the political influence of the Soviet Union in the democracies, where it would add to the strength of his country in world affairs, than in enlarging the national Communist parties. But although the American radical movement of the thirties was in this sense a movement of revolutionary idea rather than a movement of revolutionary action, for intellectuals the imagination of political change was always one of violence and barricades. American intellectuals were not drawn in any number to the Socialist Party; the Socialist Party was a party of reform, not a party of violent class conflict, and it was therefore felt to be both cowardly and ineffectual. As the thirties went on and Roosevelt restored the nation to economic stability, the desire for an American revolution on the model of the Russian revolution almost entirely disappeared. The radical zeal of earlier years of the decade was now replaced in this country by a liberal zeal of self-criticism. Liberals came to feel that while we might not be in a position to emulate the Soviet Union, neither were we in a position to feel superior to it; we had our own house to clean. This development, too, had Stalin's approval. In fact, he helped initiate the change by creating the "popular front": in 1935 it was announced that the Communist movement had abandoned its old hostility to other factions of the left and would now lead a movement against fascism in which all well-meaning people must join. Stalin's presumed leadership of a world union against fascism brought into being the period of his greatest influence in the West, certainly among intellectuals. Today, with the defeat of Communism in Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it requires a considerable effort of historical memory to bring back to mind the extent to which Stalinism dominated American culture in the years before the Second World War: in art, journalism, editing and publishing, in the theater and the entertainment industries, in the legal profession, in the schools and universities, among church and civic leaders, everywhere in our cultural life the Soviet Union exercised a control which was all but absolute. The submission to Stalinism by our opinion-forming population was not always politically conscious. It represented the fashionable trend in what was presumed to be enlightened thought.

Lionel's and my intimacy with the radical movement of the early thirties would have a deep and lasting effect on our thinking about politics and society and on the kind of work we did for the rest of our lives. It made anti-Communists of us: from our firsthand knowledge of the authoritarianism and dishonesty of the Party and its cynical betrayal of its own proposed goals, we came to our early understanding of the nature of the Soviet dictatorship and of the workings of Communism throughout the world. Neither of us was ever a Party member; at our most ardent, we came far short of making this much of a commitment. But as members of

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the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, a Communist-front organization with which we were connected between mid-1932 and the spring of 1933, we were sufficiently close to the Party to become well-acquainted with its operations. Lionel's understanding of the ways in which Stalinism worked within the culture was of course central to his novel, *The Middle of the Journey*, and made a connecting theme among the essays in the most widely read of his critical volumes, *The Liberal Imagination*. As fiction critic of the *Nation* in the forties, I would write as an avowed anti-Communist, and as a freelance writer after I left the *Nation* I frequently dealt with issues of Communism and anti-Communism. In the mid-fifties I became a member of the Executive Board of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom, whose parent organization, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, was a long unacknowledged child of the CIA. This was during a brief period in the history of the CIA when that organization was unaccustomedly ambivalent about its relation to Communism. Unlike the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the American Committee for Cultural Freedom was always forthrightly and unambiguously anti-Communist. It was not easy through all these years to be an anti-Communist in a predominantly "liberal" intellectual community. It meant that one swam against the cultural tide. To be an anti-Communist and also a liberal – that is, to be an anti-Communist without sacrifice of liberal principle – is even more difficult now that neoconservatism, often of the extreme right, claims so many anti-Communists.

Sidney Hook did not remain a Communist for long: he soon confronted the character of the Soviet regime, its absolutism and injustice and cruelty, and for the rest of his life he was a passionate opponent of Communism. But at Yaddo in the summer of 1931 he was still ignorant of the range of Stalin's power and the means by which it had been arrived at and was maintained. As he instructed us in Marxism, he could speak of the dictatorship of the proletariat as if it were merely a neutral tenet of revolutionary theory rather than the screen for a murderous tyranny. He spoke not at all of life in a society in which one could be dragged from bed in the middle of the night, never to be seen or heard of again. The Communism to which he introduced us was that of a practical utopianism: in Soviet Russia one supposedly saw the inevitable first step in the worldwide move to banish capitalist greed and inequality. We of our generation were felt to be the witnesses to a great political and social experiment. We had been given the opportunity to embark on a brave new voyage of discovery. The rhetoric was as swollen as our hopes. Hook's dialectical skills were formidable. One did not doubt his story that as a boy of ten or eleven he had converted his Orthodox father to atheism; in

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1948, during Henry Wallace's presidential campaign, Mark Van Doren had the temerity to engage Hook in political debate and was publicly annihilated. In his later years Hook became boastful in a fashion which I do not associate with him as a younger man, and this has much obscured the admiration I once had for him. In his autobiography, published shortly before his death, he immoderately tells us that it was he who supplied *Partisan Review* with its politics. More germane to my concerns, he also reports that in 1936, when Lionel was about to be dropped from his job at Columbia, it was he, Hook, who planned the strategy which won Lionel his reinstatement. These assertions are untrue. While Hook was indeed an advisory editor of *Partisan Review* and, like everyone close to the magazine, expressed and no doubt argued his political viewpoint, a magazine edited by William Phillips and Philip Rahv and Dwight Macdonald did not depend upon him for its politics. His was only another voice. He also had no part in either the restoration of Lionel's position at Columbia or, as he would have us believe, Lionel's subsequent promotion to a professorship. After Lionel's death, I discovered and published a detailed day-by-day record which Lionel had himself made in his notebooks of the events which surrounded his projected dismissal. Yet even with this evidence, Hook refused to concede that he had not salvaged Lionel's teaching career.

Under Hook's guidance, Lionel and I bowed to historical necessity and embraced the new revolutionary faith. We were not alone among the guests at Yaddo that summer in believing that in Communism lay our best hope for the future. Malcolm Cowley lacked Hook's pedagogic energy, but he was already an eager fellow traveler and would remain so for most of his long life. Max Lerner was only at the start of his professional achievement, but he was already turned to the left, and Marc Blitzstein was already at work on his now-famous revolutionary opera, *The Cradle Will Rock* – in the evenings he played excerpts from it for the rest of the guests, singing all the roles in his curiously harsh, cracked voice. Another convert of Hook's that summer was a young woman named Catherine Bauer, a disciple and friend of Lewis Mumford, who had come to Yaddo to write a book on city planning. Unable to get on with her work, she blamed her lack of progress on the breakdown of capitalism: how could one write in a society unable to feed its own people? She was the first person I knew to attribute her personal problems to our weak and malign economic system. As the decade wore on, and throughout the forties, it would become routine for writers to blame their personal failures and shortcomings, or those of their fictional characters, on the society. In the novels which I reviewed for the *Nation* in the forties, capitalism was re-

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sponsible for all the woes of mankind, from stuttering to sexual impotence.

I was singing so badly that summer that it embarrassed me to think that I might be overheard while I practiced. I had no place to spend my time except in my workroom and, to pass the hours in which I had nothing to do, I wrote another play. This time my lone venture in playwriting was called *The Young Wives' Tale.* It dealt with marital infidelity – what else? Not suprisingly, it had little action and much talk. *The Young Wives' Tale* never reached an agent; I have a copy still but cannot bring myself to read it. There was actually little reason for me to feel as lost and lonely as I felt at Yaddo. Although Mrs. Ames was not pleasant to me, all the guests were friendly. Malcolm Cowley and Marc Blitztein and Max Lerner were so kind to me that summer that I was never afterward to hold them wholly to account for what I took to be their political transgressions. But what place could be better suited to the ripening of neurosis than an artists' colony where fifteen people have been taken out of their accustomed world, mandated to be creative, and put under the rule of a woman as seemingly sympathetic as Mrs. Ames, yet in reality so willful and manipulative? The directress of Yaddo was conspicuously cordial to Lionel: despite her impaired hearing, she heard everything he said, even when he mumbled. She heard nothing I said, but she did hear that I had visited another guest at a forbidden hour, and she expelled me from Yaddo like a delinquent schoolgirl. It was humiliating and frightening. We had no money; our apartment in New York was tenanted, and I had to stay with my father. Three weeks later, she relented and asked me back.

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RAYMOND ARON

The Essence of Totalitarianism According to Hannah Arendt

Mme. Arendt's book is an important one. Despite its flaws, which are at times irritating, the reader, even if ill-willed, will feel, little by little, bewitched by the strength and subtlety of some of its analyses. Let us first briefly note a few reservations of secondary importance, and then go on to essential matters. The book's title in English, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, does not correspond to its contents. Arendt demonstrates precisely that the anti-Semitism and imperialism of the late nineteenth century are only in a limited sense the origin of modern totalitarianism. At most, one finds there only the seeds of phenomena that were to bloom in our own time.

Rather than being a well-ordered discussion of one and the same problem, the book is made up of three juxtaposed studies, and its unity stems from the author's style as much as from the real or forged connections it makes among anti-Semitism, imperialism, and totalitarianism. Historical figures, countries, parties, and events that appear in the book share a familial likeness, much as do Velázquez's children or Daumier's or Goya's personages. Mme. Arendt's style resembles Orwell's in *1984*. The mediocrity or inhumanity of all those who play a role in the drama are such that, in the end, one sees the world as the totalitarians present it, and one risks feeling mysteriously attracted by the horror or the absurdity that is described. I am not sure that Mme. Arendt herself is not in some way fascinated by the monsters she takes from reality but which her logical imagination, in some respects comparable to the imagination of the ideologues she denounces, brings to their point of perfection.

In order to find the sense or the absurdity she seeks, Mme. Arendt is often quick to justify in a small stroke, whether true or false, a general proposition which is doubtful to say the least. The Dreyfus Affair ended not, as she says, by a decision of the Court of Appeals, but by a decision of the Court of Cassation. The illegality of this decision is at least open to discussion. Her portrait of Captain Dreyfus is borrowed from anti-Dreyfusard writing and, to the best of my knowledge, does not conform to reality. A few lines from his book *Pleins Pouvoirs* do not prove that Jean

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Editor's Note: This essay originally appeared in the French journal *Critique* in 1954, as part of Aron's lengthy review of analyses of totalitarianism. It was republished in *Commentaire* (no. 28 and no. 29, 1985) as "The Essence of Totalitarianism According to Hannah Arendt." The version here omits a section of Aron's essay dealing with Arendt's treatment of anti-Semitism.

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Giraudoux was in complete accord with Petain or the Vichy government on the subject of "nationalist anti-Semitism." The reference to a book written during the war by a Frenchman in the United States does not suffice to prove the truth of the anecdote about Maurras's encounter with a female astrologer, who is said to have invited the old doctrinarian to collaborate with the Germans (which, moreover, Maurras did not do).

My remarks suggest a reproach of a certain gravity. Without even being aware of it, Mme. Arendt affects a tone of haughty superiority regarding things and men. She abuses the adjectives "grotesque" and "farcical." She seems to try hard not to see the dramas of conscience that tore at men who were Dreyfusards out of concern for truth, and conservatives or militarists out of conviction. As interpreted by Mme. Arendt, the Dreyfus Affair leaves an equivocal impression on the French reader: an excess of rationalization on the one hand and a disdain for simple mortals on the other makes for the presentation of a grimacing humanity. Picquard and Clemenceau are about the only ones to escape her historian's rigor. English readers have the same difficulty recognizing their own country's imperialists in the images Mme. Arendt has offered them. Her mixture of German metaphysics, subtle sociology, and moral vituperations ends up exaggerating the qualities and the faults of men and regimes (are all men truly unhappy in a totalitarian regime?), substituting for real history a history that is at every moment ironic or tragic. The Jews are persecuted at the very moment they have lost all real influence; South Africa is conquered at the very moment it no longer holds any strategic worth; superfluous individuals and superfluous capitals go off in quest of that most superfluous of goods, gold. . . . Each one of her theses probably contains an element of truth. Yet they could be expressed in a way that would remove from each one, through the cunning of reason, a part of the disproportionate credence that Mme. Arendt seems ready to give them.

In the first two parts of her book, Mme. Arendt writes as an historian and a sociologist. She multiplies explanations for events in accordance with their circumstances. We are inclined to accept her explanations in their particulars rather than as a whole. In the book's third part, her method changes. Totalitarianism is not to be explained by social or economic data. It is rather a regime, one unprecedented in history whose essence itself needs to be grasped. In order to understand the behavior of Hitlerites and Stalinists, one must grasp their ideology and not allow oneself to be taken with shallow, pragmatic interpretations. For example, the requisitioning of transportation during wartime for the extermination of the Jews is absurd if the primary goal was victory. The collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union is absurd, in light of the fact that it en-

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tailed the destruction of half the livestock and the catastrophic reduction of crops. Concentration camps are absurd, in view of production efficiency.

These very examples bring to the fore a question that recurs in a variety of ways. In a sense, Mme. Arendt is right. The pragmatic interpretation of totalitarian behavior is indeed erroneous, but this is so because through such an interpretation we lose sight of the very system of values and passions held by the actors. Extermination was indeed a war objective of the Hitlerites. Perhaps they even wished to attain it before the end of hostilities so that, whatever the outcome, their hatred might be satisfied. However, more serious doubts arise regarding the Soviet examples Mme. Arendt gives. The collectivization of agriculture did become irrational, but this was due to the resistance of the peasants. Collectivization did have a rational motive – increased production yields – but the planners were unable to seduce the peasants with higher prices. In order to do so, they would have had to provide consumer goods, the demand for which their industrial output could not meet. The irrationality of the labor camps, too, is more open to debate than Mme. Arendt contends. In any case, forced labor does not appear irrational to its planners because of the very possibilities it offers. But let us suppose her theses to be true as granted. Then, is Hitlerism essentially the universe of the SS, the gas chambers, the extermination commandos? Are the ravages of collectivization or the labor camps the trappings of industrial construction? Mme. Arendt replies with confidence: they are the *essence*.

Totalitarian regimes are defined neither alone by the suppression of representative institutions and multiple parties, nor by the absolute power of a team or a man. The regimes of the colonels in Poland, of Franco in Spain, even of Mussolini belong to a species of which history offers many examples. Fascism holds little or no originality. The single party occupies the place of a police force, aids in the recruitment of upper- and middle-level administrators, gathers together the leader's principal partners and makes it possible for them to reap the rewards of their complicity, and offers access to certain union or government positions for young people seeking them. Up to the time of its alliance with Hitler, fascism contained no trace of anti-Semitism or of permanent revolution. To the very end, it did not shake the traditional structure of Italian society.

Totalitarianism seems to be characterized by a certain number of institutional phenomena that Mme. Arendt analyzes admirably: the proliferation of bureaucracies, poorly linked to one another in an inextricable tangle of official spheres; the split between the party of the masses and the inner circle; the maintenance of a kind of conspiracy within the party that controls the state; the unconditioned authority of the leader, who is indis-

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pensable less for any uncommon administrative or intellectual virtues than for his ability to resolve conflicts among his comrades or the innumerable agencies; the expansion of a secret police that becomes the supreme power; the police state locking arms with an obsessional ideological propaganda addressed to the masses; and the development of an esoteric doctrine reserved for the few. No one of these phenomena in particular reveals the originality of totalitarianism. *All of them taken together* reveal its essence, named by terms such as "permanent revolution" or "terror and ideology."

Many times, in phases of revolutionary crisis, the demands of ideological orthodoxy have manifested themselves. The novelty does not lie in the fact that the Communist Party, once it seized power, sought to put aside individuals, groups, and agencies. It lies in the Communist Party's holding more sway in 1938 than in 1917, more in 1952 than in 1938. The ideological passion does not abate; rather, it is exacerbated. Stalin's Marxism is more all-encompassing than Lenin's. No one in the 1920s would have conceived of anything like the condemnation of genetics.

In the same way, totalitarian terror intensifies over time. It is fully unleashed when the regime has no more adversaries. The great purge that imprisoned between five and seven million citizens, among them key figures in technical and military spheres, took place from 1937 to 1938, at a time when peasant resistance had been broken and when the initial difficulties of the industrial buildup had been overcome. *Terror* is the essence of the totalitarian regime, terror manifest in hitherto unknown ways. From the moment punishment is meted out to a potential criminal who might have threatened the revolution or to one who, by belonging to a group condemned by history, might be harmful tomorrow, from the moment whole categories of people are singled out, everyone feels abandoned, alone. While the party's collective dynamism moves ahead, individuals become frantic or resigned, prisoners of an implacable fatality, the playthings of an inhuman force.

Once abandoned, individuals lose the organic ties that bind them to their families, their neighbors, their companions at work or in poverty. The wife or children seek the father's death; no one any longer trusts his neighbor; the secret police are present in every factory, every office, even within every home. This "massification" reaches its extreme form in the camps, where the individual is anonymous, lost in the midst of a crowd where productive solitude is forbidden. The camp management regulates the life of these phantoms who pass from an existence of shades on to death, without anyone sensing their passage as human or meaningful.

The Third Reich, according to Mme. Arendt, did not become totali-

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tarian until the last phase of the war, at the time when the genocide was consummated and Himmler was monopolizing power as minister of the interior, chief of police, commander of the home army, and so on. During Hitler's fifteen years in power, the regime was a mixed one, in which traditional elements – the army, management, the economy – limited the activity of those who in the Third Reich were called fanatical Hitlerites. Mme. Arendt's thesis is that these "fanatics" were at the core of the movement, the embodiment of its historical essence, who were not destined to give way to the moderates but who allied themselves with moderates to allay suspicion. They had camouflaged themselves as nationalists in order to seduce the philistines they despised. In the wake of victory, they would have reigned at last and so transformed the social map of Europe and extended the technique of genocide to Slavic peoples. The fanatics did indeed win out during the war, but it can be argued that this happened because of the force of circumstances, without having to assert with any certainty what would have happened in the case of a military victory for the Third Reich. With regard to Stalinist totalitarianism, Mme. Arendt limits herself to indicating that it has nothing to do with Lenin, who, quite to the contrary, would have attempted to give the Russian masses an undifferentiated structure. Likewise, she indicates that totalitarianism had nothing to do with Marxism. It could have arisen only in the 1930s.

Let us recapitulate a few of the banal statements among her profound observations. The primary but not the solely sufficient condition of a totalitarian regime is the seizure of power by a party that assures itself a monopoly of politics. This condition was attained in Lenin's own time, thanks to Lenin himself. The Bolsheviks, a minority party surrounded by enemies, took from the old regime its police, which, thanks to the civil war, had acquired greater stature and power than it had possessed in the last days of a weakened czarism. In Lenin's lifetime, the opposition parties, including the socialist and revolutionary parties, were outlawed. Marxism was not called into question, any more than was the equation of the Party's power with proletarian power. More than that, the basis for all this was set down: according to Marxist doctrine, the socialist revolution ought to have succeeded capitalist expansion; the institutions of socialist society should have been present at the heart of the old society. In the face of what actually happened, Lenin's acceptance of Trotsky's thesis that it was not impossible to jump over the bourgeois and capitalist phase was the basis for that equivocation called "socialist construction," the industrial development phase that Marxist theory itself considered to be the proper function of capitalism. Until 1923, the discrepancy between ideology and reality was not so blatant, because neither civil war and War Communism

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nor the NEP (New Economic Policy) were referred to as "socialist construction." Lenin nonetheless created the indispensable conditions for the permanent substitution of ideology for reality, in which Mme. Arendt rightly sees one of the characteristic traits of Stalinism.

What did the totalitarian regime need in order to flourish? The gap between reality and ideology had to show itself. In other words, the accelerated development of production forces in accord with forced savings and planning had to arouse phenomena comparable to those found in Western Europe at the same economic stage (though these phenomena worsened in the Soviet Union). At the same time, the ideological system of interpretation that stood as official truth had to be maintained and amplified through power. When Stalin took over the industrialization program from the leftist opposition that had formulated it, he imposed upon a recalcitrant people a comprehensive austerity program in order to finance investments. His program also required that the peasants produce grain without receiving consumer goods in return. The need to increase yields and the doctrinaire desire to destroy every class founded upon private ownership brought on the politics of collectivization. This led to the fierce repression of peasant resistance, the temporary ruin of agriculture, the slaughtering of livestock, and famine. The kind of civil war that came with the construction of factories and collective farms no doubt went on being serenely baptized as "socialist construction." Inevitably, the logical and murderous folly that to Mme. Arendt appears as the essence of totalitarianism kept on gaining ground. The Party had to be transformed into an impeccably disciplined instrument, made to believe, on orders from above, that it was daylight in the dead of night, and made to recognize "socialism" in these tragic events of first-phase industrialization. One needed an absolute faith in the Party, in History, and in the classless society as the fulfillment of humanity, in order to sustain both cynicism in one's actions and a kind of long-range idealism.

However, one could say that although circumstances can explain the totalitarianism of 1930 to 1934, they do not explain the great purge of 1936 to 1938. And therein lies Mme. Arendt's main argument, that circumstances do not account for Stalinism's totalitarian terror, since such terror increases just when it has become rationally useless. Her argument is forceful, set against superficial and erroneously objective books such as Isaac Deutscher's, in which he seeks a comprehensive explanation of totalitarian phenomena in terms of socio-economic circumstances. In spite of everything, the victims of the great purge sought to account for the phenomenon whose victims they were. Without reproducing here the sixteen theories presented by Beck and Godin (pseudonyms of a physician of Austrian extraction and a Russian historian who met while incarcerated

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in a Soviet prison) in their book *Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession* in 1951, some of them at least suggest interpretations that make the repression partially intelligible, however absurd its excesses.

The hierarchical, inegalitarian, despotic society that came out of the five-year plans bore no resemblance to the image fashioned beforehand by the revolutionaries. There could be no resemblance because, according to the very theory that subordinates social organization to forces of production, a sufficient development of the latter was the indispensable condition of socialist benefits. Since the development of the means of production, deceptively baptized "socialism," required still many more five-year plans, those idealists who would never be reconciled to this fact had to be eliminated. Starting from this discrepancy between ideology and reality, other theories were elaborated: the scapegoat theory (that responsibility for failures and hardships should be laid on the privileged few); the testing theory (that Party members must blindly accept any decision, even one that strikes at them, in order that the indispensable transfer of loyalty from the ideal to the Party be accomplished); the theory of Caesarean mania for persecution (that the government must be in anguish when it knows it is lying, knows that the masses know it, and that the masses are aware the government knows they know), and so on.

There is more, however. Reality itself to some extent requires terror. A fundamental contradiction gnaws at the socialist buildup, that is, at industrialization under the impetus of the state. If it is legal and moderate, state-controlled and bureaucratic initiative cannot be favorable to the increase of production and to productivity. It can be made to work only through the method of the Pharaohs or by appeal to individual interest. The builders' indifference to means and human resources, so long as goals are attained, takes ultimate form in the recruitment of forced laborers. In the bureaucratic framework, on the other hand, technical specialists or managers are the pioneers. They must make the plan work, and they succeed only by using clandestine networks that spawn on the fringe of legal channels. It is no less risky for them to remain within the bounds of the law than to transgress it. Terror is perhaps indispensable to avoid a bureaucratic petrification that would obstruct the achievement of the paradoxical task: developing means of production under state impetus. Were the regime ever to become stabilized, a hierarchical bureaucracy would appear, resembling in its exterior forms the Ch'in dynasty, and henceforth encompassing an industrial rather than a predominantly agricultural society.

Is it possible to give the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, that product of industrialization, all the advantages it already possesses (high salaries, non-

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graduated income taxes, educational benefits to children), as well as personal security and stable employment? Such stability would slow down production. Given the age at which, in the 1920s and 1930s, those bourgeoisie came to occupy secure and permanent top positions, social dissatisfaction would be concentrated in them and give them an authority and confidence that would progressively limit the Party's omnipotence. The Party maintains social mobility; at the same time it itself represents the only source of conflict resolution within a ruling class that has not yet established constitutional, peaceable procedures by which to regulate conflicts.

All these explanations, even when they are combined, leave us with a mysterious margin: the mass arrest of millions of people which crippled industries, the army, and the managerial elite was neither necessary nor reasonable. It is not certain that anyone wanted the great purge as it actually unfolded, any more than anyone wanted collectivization as it was practiced. The snowballing mechanism described in Alexander Weissberg's admirable book, *L'Accusé* (1953), may have intervened as much as Stalin's sadism did.

These sociological explanations, sketched quickly here, are by no means incompatible with Mme. Arendt's interpretations which seek out the essence of totalitarianism. The complex connections she establishes among terror, ideology, and the police do not vanish on account of these explanations. It is not out of the question to consider terror the essence of the totalitarian regime in order to distinguish it from simple tyranny, which is the absolute power of one alone ruling over all and reducing them to impotence. But the totalitarian essence did not arise mysteriously, fully armed, out of the mind of History or of the mind of Stalin. Certain circumstances favored its emergence, and others will foster its disappearance.

In her essay, "Ideology and Terror," written originally in 1953 for the Karl Jaspers *Festschrift* [which later appeared as the final chapter of the revised editions of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* beginning in 1958], Mme. Arendt articulates both her method and her thought by recourse to Montesquieu's ideas. Every political regime has a nature and a principle. The nature is "that which makes a thing be what it is and the principle is what makes it act." The monarchical principle is honor, the republican principle is virtue. Tyranny's principle is fear. However, Mme. Arendt goes on to say that totalitarianism has no principle. A regime whose ideology proclaims cosmic or historical laws superior to the will of human beings, whose praxis throws individuals into isolation and abandonment and prepares them to accept the roles of executioner or victim, is not

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even moved by fear. In order for fear to move anyone to act, the individual must believe that by his action he will escape threats of repression or purge. Totalitarianism is an attempt to exercise total domination of men which dehumanizes them, either by sending them to concentration camps or, in so-called normal society, by subjecting them to obsessive propaganda and to mysterious decisions made by authorities who themselves appeal to cosmic and human laws.

One cannot help asking whether, formulated this way, Mme. Arendt's thesis is not contradictory. A regime without a principle is not a regime. It cannot be compared to either a monarchy or a republic. As a regime, it exists only in its creator's imagination. In other words, Mme. Arendt constructs an essentially political regime out of certain aspects of Hitlerian and Stalinist phenomena. She draws out and probably exaggerates the originality of German and Russian totalitarianism. Taking this genuine originality to be the equivalent of a fundamental regime, she is led to see in our time the negating of traditional philosophies. And she slides toward a contradiction: defining a functioning regime by an essence that implies the impossibility of its functioning.

In one sense, the ideology and terror of totalitarianism are the amplification of revolutionary phenomena, a connection made by Crane Brinton in *The Anatomy of Revolution* (1952). As has often been said, the Bolsheviks are Puritans or Jacobins who succeeded, that is, who held on to power. They too say or think that only the pure will save the Revolution. They too, once they embody that state, reject the liberty they demanded of their enemies in power. They too are the apostles of "the despotism of liberty," a logical contradiction which an historian can easily explain, since social upheavals in their first phase exclude democratic methods, even if they are to be ultimately favorable to democracy. A revolutionary society imposes on its militants a break with all other bonds. Nothing, neither family nor work, matters in the face of true faith – in God or in the classless society – and authentic action for individual or collective salvation. To the extent that this attitude and these beliefs are maintained, the common man in effect finds himself, according to Mme. Arendt's analysis, sacrificed to mysterious laws, severed from close-knit communities, subjected to a terror that merges not only with the arbitrary will of one man, but also with a sort of fatality.

One could say that revolutionary fever, as Crane Brinton analyzes it, cannot last for as long as several decades. Yet indeed, Bolshevism has taken on patent, even radical newness in comparison with other revolutionary societies. Aiming beyond the goals of the Puritans or the Jacobins, situating the Promised Land at the end of historical development, promising economic equality and abundance for all, Bolshevism entails

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and justifies a prolonged revolution, as it baptizes the development of the means of production to be "socialist construction." The accumulation of capital or technical Westernization under the direction of a revolutionary sect results in this mixture of terror and ideology characteristic of the rule of extremists.

At the same time, socialist construction under state impetus follows upon a Russian tradition – as Elie Halévy put it, the Communist Party is a collective Peter the Great. It reestablished a bureaucracy that is at once managerial and technical, far more extensive by contrast with the czarist bureaucracy. Little by little, the Stalinist bureaucracy guarantees itself material advantages, prestige, external signs of hierarchy, and imitations of traditional bureaucracy. To the benefit of the Party's Secretary General, the secular religion of revolutionary ideology ends up playing the same role that orthodox religion did for the czars. Caesaro-papism is reborn, and the interpreter of history becomes the pope-emperor.

The totalitarian phenomenon thus entails many interpretations because it has many causes. The method that aims at grasping its essence is legitimate, but on the condition that it does not neglect complementary methods. Otherwise, one cannot raise what is perhaps the most important question: for how long a time is totalitarianism destined to last? Is it the temporary and pathological accompaniment of certain transformations? Or is it, despite its intrinsic absurdity, capable of prolonging itself in a kind of permanent dehumanization of human societies? In *1984*, George Orwell suggested a sociological thesis: the single party, the authoritarian bureaucracy, the state orthodoxy, the investment plans and privations imposed on all, the psychological conditioning of the victims – all of these are susceptible to forging a system compatible with industrial society. While progress in productivity would make it possible for the first time in history for a higher culture to be founded without the misery of the greater number, the totalitarian regime encourages war and despotism, reserving once again the profits of civilization for the few alone. In Orwell's thesis, totalitarianism is not be connected with a buildup phase of industrial development or attributable to the weight of a specifically Russian past, but it bears the politico-ideological superstructure of a modern planned economy.

In a contrary view, Isaac Deutscher decreed that Stalinist barbarity was the more or less inevitable method by which Russian barbarity was dispelled and that it would not survive the process of the country's technical Westernization. By its works, Stalinism would destroy its own foundation. There are several objections to raise against both Deutscher's thesis and the way he demonstrates it. Yet he has asked the decisive question: does not the industrialization of society itself tend to erode the foun-

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dations of Stalinism? More than anything else, I want to delineate a distinction that is implicit in Mme. Arendt's book, between bureaucratic despotism and economic planning on the one hand, and totalitarianism (that is, ideology and terror) on the other. Economic progress tends of itself to eliminate or attenuate the latter, but in no way does it exclude the former.

As the social elite's intellectual level rises and a democratic bourgeoisie becomes stabilized, terrorism and ideological fanaticism will be more and more difficult to maintain because they will go against the people's spontaneous aspirations, and because a party that is increasingly recruited from among the technical elite and privileged people inevitably loses the purity and fanaticism of a sect. On the other hand, bureaucratic despotism remains the most useful superstructure of the Soviet-type planned economy. It is doubtful that election procedures could be introduced in such a regime, unless there was an unforeseen increase in available resources. But an authoritarian bureaucracy cannot completely do without an ideology to justify itself, and such an ideology always carries the risk of reviving revolutionary crises.

A more thorough analysis would have to take a number of factors into account: Will one of Stalin's successors succeed in making himself the absolute leader, that is, succeed in eliminating his rivals or in convincing the masses that he is in the process of eliminating his rivals? How will the international conflict evolve? How will the Chinese revolution effect Russia's regime? Too many different elements are involved, too many accidents and too many people can intervene, to allow predictions to be formulated. Totalitarian phenomena, as we have known them in the first half of the twentieth century, have been linked simultaneously to a revolutionary party, to an authoritarian bureaucracy, and to drastic happenings such as war or the frenzied accumulation of capital. We have not yet experienced a totalitarian revolution's return to normal life. This lack of experience calls for prudence in making predictions. It does not forbid us from hoping that there might be an outcome other than apocalyptic catastrophe in response to the furors of the abandoned masses and faithless pseudo-intellectuals. It would be wrong to insist that human irrationality has won the day once and for all.

Translated from the French by Marc Le Pain and Daniel Mahoney

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SLAVENKA DRAKULIĆ

Letter from Croatia

By now, thanks to live television broadcasting of the war in former Yugoslavia, there is much less need to explain what or where Croatia is: an independent state between Slovenia and Serbia, at the southeast end of Central Europe. As Croatia was once a province in the Austro-Hungarian empire, Croats themselves like to think they are culturally and traditionally a part of Western Europe and that getting out of Yugoslavia naturally means returning to Europe. But it seems that Western Europe is not overjoyed at the prospect of widening the family with such a problematic relative so soon: poverty, refugees, unemployment, lack of democracy, poor prospects for profitable investment – all these are reasons for the West to figure that perhaps it is still better to keep Croatia standing on its doorstep like an illegitimate child. Provided with new passports – blue to be sure, no longer Yugoslav red – Croats are now confronted with the unpleasant faces of police and customs officers on the borders of Western countries, most of which also require visas. The sad fact is that Croatia is now identified with the pictures of horror that CNN, Sky News, and other media dispatched to every corner of the globe almost every day last winter; with pictures of Dubrovnik, this time shelled, surrounded, and without water or electricity for months; with pictures of Vukovar, first besieged and then almost erased from the face of the earth. Then Osijek, Vinkovci, Gospic. . . . This is a country victimized by war and the Serbian occupation of one-third of its territory, with over 6,000 people dead and 20,000 wounded, several thousand missing, and more than 300,000 displaced persons of its own plus half a million refugees who fled from Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is shaped like a half-moon, a banana perhaps. To me, it looks like an apple-core bitten so thin in the middle that I'm afraid it might one day break in two.

I am very happy when Americans visit this new state, especially if they are here for the first time, although the truth is Americans don't come in great numbers these days unless they happen to be journalists or members of humanitarian organizations. Recently I listened to a Washingtonian loudly admiring the food in a Zagreb restaurant: "It's so delicious!" he exclaimed. "You wouldn't dream about such dishes anywhere in Moscow. And not only that, I've been walking around the city today, and the people are so well-dressed; the shops are full of foreign

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goods. This is Europe!" I have to admit that I like to hear this, in spite of the fact that my very first reaction to such excitement is a kind of uneasiness, perhaps even anger. What image did this person have of Zagreb and Croatia anyway? Then I remember all the pictures he must have seen before he came here, and I understand his delight completely. I become delighted myself. This city doesn't look at all like the city of a country on the edge of a war zone. When I tell my friends in the United States that the front lines are some thirty miles from Zagreb, at first they don't believe it. Then they start to panic. Then they suggest that I come over and stay with them until the war ends. (Ends? At that moment, I realize that my friends' concept of war is a kind of quick Desert Storm, something that here in Croatia is obviously out of the question.) When I finally refuse my friends' generous offers of hospitality, they think I'm either crazy or heroic. Well, I am neither, and that is precisely what is difficult to explain to anyone who doesn't live here.

Zagreb is a typical Central European city, with nineteenth-century buildings painted yellow, white, blue, even pink, like huge decorated cakes. It has a main square paved with marble, a charming old town on a hill, street cars, and many pleasant sidewalk cafés. One can see soldiers, perhaps more than usual, but one can see no damage, no poverty, no refugees at first sight, only youngsters strolling around. Yes, but . . . but everything here is different than it looks. More precisely, life here is not only what is visible. This is why, for me, Zagreb is a kind of metaphor for schizophrenic living. What one can see, what I can see when I go to the open market on Saturdays and then have coffee with friends in a Ban Jelacic Square café, are only masks. And the longer I look at the city and its residents, the more I detect that they are pretending to live with all their might in normality; that they are now on the verge of hysteria, as if they are afraid the masks they're wearing will fall down at any moment, exposing their reality, their poverty, all their fears. Cracks are already visible to the careful observer. "People are not buying new shoes. They wear old ones. Last year I looked at their faces. This year I look at their dresses, at what they buy," says a photographer who has been documenting Zagreb city life for the past two years. It's no wonder: one pair of shoes costs about eighty dollars, an average monthly wage. But neither are people buying meat. They buy potatoes and pasta, maybe vegetables, and no fruit. (One good thing about Zagreb is that everything is available to buy.) This is only one of the many faces of war in this city – the giving up on everything little by little, until one can afford only the bare necessities.

Only a year and a half ago (it seems so long ago!), hardly anyone would use the word "war." Until it comes to your own door, war is an

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abstraction. As you see it on television, as you read about it, as people talk about it, at first you imagine it as a mythical animal – distant and dangerous but somehow not real. As it comes closer, you can feel it all around you, you can even smell its heavy breath, but you still think it is happening to someone else, not you. You have problems understanding it, you ask why or how it is possible, but no one can answer your questions, because when people start killing each other, these kinds of questions become unimportant. It seems as if the people around you, colleagues, neighbors, are all behaving as though it is perfectly logical, perfectly clear. You are left alone. Waiting. Waiting for the war to happen to you. Then it grabs you. It could happen while you are in your kitchen or while driving a car – one small detail, a sudden glance at the sandbags propped up in front of your cellar window to protect the building's bomb shelter. It can be anything. That is when you realize that the war is happening to you, too. I remember one morning in September when the air-raid sirens in Zagreb had already sounded the danger of an attack. I decided not to go down to the shelter, not even to get out of bed. "Let it happen here if it must," I said to myself. It was a beautiful, clear day, and I looked at the chestnut tree in front of my window. Its leaves had just started to fall. Then I watched a beam of sunlight shining in the window. Passing through the lace curtain, it formed a little patch of light on the bed. The patch moved slowly, sliding through the room as time passed. It was nice, peaceful. No cars or trams – during air-raid alarms traffic has to stop – no voices . . . I felt perfectly calm. I didn't think about my relatives or my friends, about people at all. I thought about things. I took a good look at my room; at the books piled up at my bedside that I intended to read; the family photos hanging on the wall; the cupboard, table, mirror, lamp – as if I were caressing them. The room looked as if I had never seen it before, every detail illuminated by the morning light. Suddenly I realized I was looking at the room as though I were never going to see it again. Only then did the fear break out of me, in a cold sweat, as I lay in bed curled up, sinking into nothingness.

This state of fear can't last for long. The next step is adaptation. How can you adapt to the death surrounding you? You instinctively invent a parallel reality. There is a war, and it is changing your life, it is happening to you, too. But in order to function, you have to behave as if that situation is normal, so you must continue your everyday activities, with a routine to keep you from going insane. Recently, it was reported in the newspapers that the last animal in the Sarajevo zoo, a brown bear, had died. All the other animals had died a long time ago. The zoo keepers had brought them food while there was any at all to be had, but then one keeper was shot, and it became too dangerous, because of the snipers, to

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feed the animals. In spite of the danger, one Monday morning a keeper brought an apple and a piece of bread to the dying bear, but the animal was already too weakened to survive. At first glance, one would think that the keeper's act was totally absurd and that he was acting against his own self-preservation. If there was any food around at all (and there are reports that people in Sarajevo are eating dandelions, leaves, and grass), shouldn't he have eaten that precious apple and bread himself, or at least given it to his family? No, he continued to take his duties as a keeper seriously, even under the impossible living conditions in Sarajevo's hell, and he stuck to the idea of "normality." Thus, while it appeared he was acting against himself, the keeper was actually doing something for himself, creating "order," a parallel reality, out of chaos.

Croatia is not to be compared with Bosnia and Herzegovina, nor Zagreb with Sarajevo, but it is still a twilight zone where anything might happen, and one survives only by developing a specific kind of ambivalent attitude to the atmosphere, not wholly reflective of war but not reflective of peace either. In spite of the nice European face of this city, people have disappeared during the night. On the outskirts of Osijek and Split, houses and cars have been blown up. If you leave your apartment empty for a couple of weeks, you might find refugees there upon your return. Drunken war veterans are killing each other with bombs and automatic weapons in bars every night. All kinds of black market activities flourish, as well as arms- and drug-smuggling. There are refugee camps all over. People are getting poorer and poorer, but still red, yellow, and green traffic lights change regularly at the crossroads. The Dior and Benetton shops are open, street cars are running, and there is fresh bread to buy every morning. Perhaps all this sounds a bit like life in New York, except that here one cannot choose to live on an Upper East Side, ignoring the war. There is no Upper East Side, and the war is happening to everyone in one way or another, changing everyone's view of life, values, morale, emotions . . . breaking them in two.

The war is not the only thing that has happened in this country since 1989. It has experienced a change of political power, too. In the spring of 1990, a new government was elected in the first free multiparty elections organized by a transformed Communist party. It means that the citizens of Croatia not only live in a new state but also in a politically different system, a democracy. At least, this is what citizens have been told by the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) party leaders, who just about equal the government. The problem is that democracy is not fruit on a tree waiting to be picked by any government. This is especially true when talking about the government of an ex-Communist country where even the leadership doesn't have much of an idea about what democracy is or

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how it works – not to mention that the country has no democratic tradition or culture at all. This creates yet another kind of confusion: people ask themselves whether what they have now is really a democracy. It's hard to expect anything beyond a theoretical democracy that fails to work in reality, when the ruling party and the political elite it represents is dominated by the converted old Communist cadre and right-wing ex-emigrants who have returned to Croatia. Many high-ranking party and government officials are originally from Herzegovina, the least-developed part of the country, and the citizens of Zagreb swear it is easy to detect this new political elite: they wear white socks, the backs of their heads are flat, and they drive the latest-model BMWs. These people came with money they had made abroad and gave it to "the Croatian cause" – for the HDZ, for independence, for arms. One might forgive them their love of white socks and even the primitive attitudes they display while demonstrating their power, if only they would strive to really build a democracy. But they see democracy as a golden apple they themselves plucked and handed to the Croatian people, a gift one may look at but not touch. Since democracy here is constantly referred to as "our young democracy" and since the word for it in our language takes the female declension, perhaps it is perceived as a young maiden who was held prisoner by the bad Communists until a brave knight (the President himself?) came and freed her from their demonic hands. "Democracy" is on everyone's lips, so much so that it is becoming one more empty idiom, just as *socialism* and *communism* once were. Even though the new constitution legalized a multiparty system and free elections, this alone doesn't make Croatia a democratic country. The well-known liberal intellectual and publisher Slavko Goldstein says, "I think that the majority in the government wants a democratic Croatia, but some think that it is not yet time for democracy. Others think that the most desirable democracy is one in which they themselves will be in the position to decide because they know best. Yet others think the state has to take a decisive role because it is in a transitory stage moving towards God-knows-what, much the same as in Stalinist times when state repression supposedly preceded the dying-out of the state itself. . . . However, the most dangerous kind of totalitarianism develops when the state becomes the owner of the economy and has a monopoly over the mass media."

Besides the war and the political changes in the direction of democracy, a third phenomenon has taken place in Croatia: the total national homogenization. Compared to the other post-Communist countries, Croatia was extremely unlucky, because her destiny was linked to Serbia. In Serbia, the reform process was kidnapped by the national Communists, asserts the sociologist Vesna Pusic: "The reversal of political transforma-

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tion, or changes of the political regime within one party such as that which took place in Serbia, had a disastrous effect upon the process of reform throughout Yugoslavia. It delayed the beginning of the process of reform towards democracy in the other republics and from the outset gave these reforms a powerful push in the reverse direction. . . . Since it was national Communists who were in charge, that is, Communists who based their collectivism on the concept of the nation and nationalist ideology, it meant that the national and nationalist questions had to be the main issue from the outset." In such a situation, the idea of developing a civil society and a democratic culture didn't have much of a chance, even without a war, and war has only made it more difficult. If the idea of "the nation" becomes the leading idea of one society, then every civil right based on the individual becomes less important, put on the back burner until "better times." During periods of national homogenization, a person is no longer judged by profession, age, education, or political affiliation, but is reduced to the lowest common denominator – the nation – to the point that being a Croat (or a Serb) literally becomes one's destiny. By stripping the individual of everything personal and reducing him to a member of a nation, a nationalist society becomes a mass society. In contrast, in developing a democracy, the individual must be given the right to make changes in political and social life. This is why nationalism and democracy do not belong together.

In Croatia, nationalism that erases all personal differences and survives on the hatred of others is confused with patriotism, which is in fact the freedom to love your country in the best way that you as an individual can. This is the juncture at which, in the best manner of the old Bolsheviks, the production of enemies began. As if it is not enough to have outside enemies, such as the Serbs, the "good" fundamentalist Croats began to search for, and in their feverish search to produce, so-called "inside enemies." Upon Croatia's acceptance into the United Nations last spring, President Franjo Tudjman gave a triumphant and supposedly historical speech about the "fulfillment of a thousand-year-old dream of the Croatian people" to have their own independent state. True, the occasion was historical, but his speech was not. The President could not restrain himself from pointing out – or better, from warning his nation – that its perfect unity had been spoiled by "a fistful of sold-out scoundrels." This is how he labeled intellectuals who dared to disagree, and in public, with some of the things the government says or does. In a way, he had already inaugurated the atmosphere of a witch-hunt when, a year before, he gave an interview explaining who the "good guys" were: "It is clear who deserves the name of *intelligentsia*, those who are the bearers of national spirit and self-determination." All others, he said, are

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"pharisees." With such clear instructions on how to distinguish "pharisees" from "honest intelligentsia," as the old Communists said, the numerous thought police could throw themselves on the tedious but obviously important job of moral cleansing among the intellectuals, part of the official program of "spiritual renewal" that produces more and more casualties every day.

Who are the supposedly dishonest intellectuals? It appears that the label applies to a variety of individuals, from the left (Branko Horvat) to the right (Dobroslav Paraga), from journalists (Jelena Lovrić) to the leader of one Serbian minority party in Croatia (Milorad Pupovac). The list – informal, of course – includes some writers, various political leaders, university professors, and so on. Among the media, the sole satirical publication and one daily paper have been singled out. The interesting thing is that the attacks are not made directly by politicians; they are carried out by journalists eager to prove absolute fidelity to their new masters by doing their dirty work. The attacks are usually brutal and crude, without proof or arguments. One day you wake up, open a newspaper, and find out that you are, say, a "Yugo-Zombie." The principal "sin" of these "inside enemies," and perhaps the only thing they have in common, is that they think differently and have expressed their thinking when and where they can. Such "sins" are typical in Communist systems, but as the new state has not departed from the model of a one-party type of rule, it too makes natural victims of these "inside enemies."

It is what I call "Jelena's Paradox." Jelena Lovrić is a famous political journalist who used to work for the most serious and influential political news magazine, *Danas*. During the last ten years of Communist rule in Yugoslavia, she was admired for her courage and integrity, for her criticism of the Party and her struggle to bring about democratic changes – while remaining a Communist herself. When the new government came to power, she continued to write critically, but as the war started and national homogenization reached the top, Lovrić was labeled a non-patriot and a Yugo-nostalgic, equal to treason. From being a popular heroine, she sunk to being unemployed and the recipient of anonymous threats. This would have been understandable, if Lovrić had herself resisted and failed to adapt to the new circumstances of democracy – freedom of the press, investigative journalism, and the other changes – as was the case with many journalists in ex-Communist countries who were able to function in one system but not in the other. However, this was not the case with Lovrić, as her actions proved. The paradox is that she and others like her who have made the changes in this country possible should be winners now. Instead, they are losers. They ever appear to be double losers. There is no public opinion now to stand up for Lovrić and the others who ac-

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tually made it possible for public opinion to exist at all during Communism. The little that existed has disappeared under the extreme ideological pressure of the ruling party and its imperatives to "cleanse" the state administration, universities, public offices, large state-owned companies, and especially the mass media, of any "unwanted elements."

When the general manager of Croatian Radio and Television, Anton Vrdoljak, who is very close to the President, publicly declares that he reads the newspapers only while sitting on the toilet, and when ex-Minister of Information and Director of HINA, the national news agency, Milovan Sibl says that no journalist of mixed Croat and Serbian blood can write objectively about the Croatian government, then you have an unmistakable if gloomy picture of what the real situation is. Radio and television are state-owned and controlled, and the press is censored in several ways. The printing presses as well as the greater part of distribution are sponsored by the state. If the ruling party does not like a magazine and wants it to fold, it is enough that a printer refuses to print it; this is what happened to *New Danas*. Even if a printer is willing to print something, distributors can refuse to distribute it, as was also the case with *New Danas*. This second kind of censorship is perhaps the most dangerous, since it is self-censorship and comes from within. It is a product of the old system but also a result of the methods of control established by the new system. In his latest report, special United Nations envoy for human rights Tadeusz Mazowiecki said that he is worried because "human rights are threatened with the spread of a nationalist ideology that marginalizes not only ethnic minorities but also those Croats who are critical of the government. This is felt especially by intellectuals. This phenomenon feeds on the continuation of strict governmental control over radio and television."

It is all more complicated than it seems, because the intellectuals themselves have helped create this atmosphere, which again brings us to the war. To justify their more or less silent approval of official politics, the majority of Croatian intellectuals took the position that it was immoral to criticize the government of their country which, because it had been attacked, was a victim: to do so would be to serve the enemy's interest. Those intellectuals who felt otherwise, that there is no reason to postpone the development of democratic institutions and that such dilemmas only obstruct the democratic impetus in the country, became, as defined by the government, heretics and traitors to the national interest. They reflect the bottom line of the Croatian opposition parties. Although the parties make up roughly thirty percent of the parliament, they are totally marginalized; their ideas and proposals are publicly ridiculed by the ruling party.

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Nevertheless, the opposition parties take the stand that while Croatia is in a dangerous situation, they are morally obliged to support the government's or the President's decisions. The opposition has little influence in public life. As well, there are problems with the relations among the legislative, judicial, and executive powers. There are serious estimates that almost one-half of the "gray economy" in Croatia is controlled by a mafia. And there is the problem of the *domovnica* – the document issued to prove Croatian citizenship and denied to many Serbs in Croatia.

Perhaps the most important and sensitive issue, consequently the least discussed, is the fact that between 1941 and 1945 Croatia was a fascist state. The new Croatian government has never clearly distanced itself from this past, and its key figures, such as Cardinal Stepinac and Mile Budak, have in fact been rehabilitated, if not deified, while the antifascist past of the country consistently is being forgotten. Street names have been changed, monuments destroyed or replaced, and one wonders whether the process of erasing history is taking place all over again. This may explain why leading European intellectuals like Gunther Grass and George Konrád did not publicly support Croatia in the worst days of Serbian aggression: at the time, Croatia had not even started its process of denazification. Furthermore, at the beginning of the war there were many volunteer soldiers wearing the insignia of the Ustasha army while top military officials, the government, and public opinion remained silent.

Under what Jelena Lovrić calls "the production of fear," there is no professional loyalty among people, and even personal friendships suffer. The government continues to exploit for its own purposes the insecurity entrenched by the war. Now, when independence has been won, the most important questions for this country should be, "What kind of life are we going to have here?" But the future seems to be such an abstraction that no one is willing to discuss it. Croatian social life appears to contain traces of the "institutionalized insecurity" identified by Juan Corradi in his book *Fear and Politics in Argentina*, where people become afraid of uncontrolled violence, crime, poverty, inflation, loss of jobs. Everything seems to be *déjà vu,* especially to those of the older generation who compare the atmosphere to that of 1945 in Croatia – which doesn't make me optimistic.

What finally constitutes the other side of our lives in a post-Communist country is a fear not so evident on the surface. One of the worst things that the Communist governments did to people everywhere was to usurp their right to a future. Everyone knew that in the future only a more "perfect" Communism was waiting for them, so no one hurried to get there. Nevertheless, people did dream about the future, and

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in their dreams there was no poverty, no war, no enemies, and, most important, no fear. Three years after 1989 and "the death of Communism," the citizens of the post-Communist countries are slowly realizing that the dream has turned into a nightmarish reality of economic crisis, xenophobia, war, nationalisms, new personality cults, and religious revivals. They see that all this is changing the face of the entire European continent. For that reason, not only Croatia but all of Europe, East and West, represents a kind of twilight zone. People have also learned that Communism is far from dead. In fact, the problem is that it continues to live in people's minds. It is built into the new democratic states, and it revives the old fear of a state that controls its citizens. The future is uncertain for all of us, but for some it seems to be postponed until "better times." Yet perhaps we should not forget one enormous difference between the past and the present: it is now legitimate to hope and work for a better future. It is legitimate to dream.

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ROBERT ALTER

Modernism and Nostalgia

Kafka and Proust were Walter Benjamin's two touchstones of literary modernism. He collaborated in the translation of two volumes of Proust's vast novel, and throughout the 1930s he meditated on Kafka, from his 1934 *Jüdische Rundschau* essay to his 1938 essay-letter to Gersham Scholem, by which time he was actually thinking about doing a book on Kafka – the only contemporary to whose work he would contemplate devoting such attention. In one obvious way, there was an element of inevitability in Benjamin's choice of Kafka and Proust as his two defining modernist figures. Among the novelists whose masterworks were published in the early 1920s, when Benjamin was emerging as a critic, the three most radical innovators were Joyce, Kafka, and Proust, and though I suspect Benjamin would have found much to admire passionately in Joyce, the language barrier kept the Irish writer at a distance, whereas Kafka and Proust were products, respectively, of Benjamin's native and adopted European culture. The uncompromising radicalism of Kafka's and Proust's literary projects clearly spoke to Benjamin's own problematic sense of modernity. He begins his 1929 essay on Proust (available in English in the volume titled *Illuminations*) by noting with approval the idea "that all great works of literature found a genre or dissolve one." This rather general notion is strongly reinforced by Benjamin's implicit assumption in his discussions of both Proust and Kafka that European culture in the early twentieth century stood under a sign of historical crisis that particularly demanded for its authentic expression the dissolution and creation of literary forms. Proust thus may be a grand culmination of the realist novel as it had been perfected in nineteenth-century France, but he overflows its generic channels, sweeping fiction into autobiography, social and moral analysis, philosophic reflection, and poetry. And Kafka, in quite an opposite direction, invokes the antecedent tradition of the European novel in a kind of fantastic recapitulation (as Marthe Robert has argued), while willfully short-circuiting most of its operating assumptions about causality, temporal continuity, the representation of character, place, and social milieu.

The evident oppositeness of Proust and Kafka deserves reflection. They are, in fact, so different from each other that most critics who have

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been deeply engaged in one of these two writers have paid little attention to or have even disparaged the other. (Thus, Edmund Wilson's appreciation of Proust was one of the most luminous chapters of *Axel's Castle*, whereas he would later dismiss Kafka's fiction, in *Classics and Commercials*, as "the half-expressed gasp of a self-doubting soul trampled under. I do not see how one can possibly take him for either a great artist or a moral guide.") It is an instructive measure of the parameters of Benjamin's critical world that he should have readily taken both Kafka and Proust for great artists and moral guides while clearly recognizing the profound differences between the two.

Let us call it a game of mirror-readings: Benjamin reflecting Kafka and Proust, who thus obliquely reflect each other. But Benjamin's critical reflections are often willfully presented as in a glass darkly. He was, in both a positive and a negative sense, an oracular writer. His highly-packed formulations often require interpretation, sometimes are powerfully suggestive, usually leave gaps in the argument, and occasionally may be quite wrong. The mirror-readings I shall attempt are intended to catch an elusive but deep affinity that links these three modernists. The idea behind the specular experiment of this essay is that modernism as a phenomenon of literary history, crossing boundaries and switching emphases, is so protean that it may come into clearer focus through juxtapositions than through neat definition.

We need to register certain salient differences between Kafka and Proust – not chiefly those that would meet the eye of the common reader but those that are defined by Benjamin in the characteristically uncommon readings of them which he proposes. In Kafka's fiction, the essential movement Benjamin perceives is the *gesture*; in Proust, it is the *image*. Gestures have no preconceived meaning for Kafka; "rather, the author tried to derive such a meaning from them in ever-changing contexts and experimental groupings." Thus, the narrative struggle for meaning is the dynamic that informs Kafka's writing, and whatever profundity there is in his "gestic" world exists, paradoxically, I would say, on the surface of the narrated events. The Proustian image, on the other hand, is the main instrument of the French writer's "impassioned cult of similarity." The extravagantly elaborated simile or metaphor, which often leads to an alternative or secondary metaphor, allows for a proliferation of meanings below the sensuous surface of the narrative materials, in the inner depths of the narrator's consciousness. The stylistic translation of these two divergent impulses is spareness for Kafka; sumptuousness, syntactic convolution for Proust. Proust's ultimate quest, Benjamin insists, is for happiness, at least in its "elegiac form": Kafka's quest, I think Benjamin implies, is, in

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contrast, for a truth he knows will elude him, which in the end he may even forego. Thus the mysticism that Benjamin proposes as one of the two focuses of Kafka's world (the other being the experience of the modern urbanite) is inevitably a failed mysticism, whereas Proust exhibits a mysticism of consciousness, without transcendent grounding, which succeeds in some degree precisely because of the circumscribed sphere in which it performs.

This fundamental divergence between a fiction of gesture and a fiction of the image is correlated with two other oppositions that Benjamin sees between Proust and Kafka, one obvious and generally acknowledged, the other somewhat enigmatic and a reflection of Benjamin's peculiar conceptual vocabulary. Proust's cultivation of a realm of proliferating images is predicated on a full verbal apprehension, visual and otherwise sensuous, of the surface images of personal and social experience. This means that before he is anything else, Proust is a realist, offering us an elaborately nuanced representation of milieu, material setting, interior décor, landscape, class relations, social stereotypes, vocational traits, psychological profiles. None of this, of course, interests Kafka, who instead creates a drastically foreshortened fictional world in which he "tears open the sky behind every gesture." What this means is that every act, utterance, and event in Kafka's work seems urgently portentous, though it is almost never clear what might be portended. To describe this dynamic in the most obvious generic terms, Kafka writes parables, not realistic fictions. But they are by no means traditional parables, and Benjamin boldly grasped their radical nature in the second of his Kafka essays when he proposed that Kafka had created an *aggadah* – lore, legend, narratively transmissible teaching – that entirely displaced or threatened to destroy the *halakhah*, the law or doctrine, which in the traditional system it was supposed to serve. (Benjamin had no doubt picked up the terms of this binary opposition from his early reading in German translation of H. N. Bialik's influential Hebrew essay, "Halakhah and Aggadah," but the twist he gave the terms in applying them to Kafka aligns them more with the modernist antinomianism of another major essay by Bialik, "Revealment and Concealment in Language.")

The second, more difficult opposition between Kafka and Proust dictated by the difference between gesture and image is the opposition between a prehistoric world in Kafka and a surrealist one in Proust. Surrealism was something of a personal catchword for Benjamin. When he first wrote Scholem about the Parisian Arcades project he never completed, he intimated that what he aspired to do in assembling a vast collage of historical documents was to apply to historical process the surrealist

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technique of free association. The Proustian image as he describes it leads away from the realism of the surface to "the true surrealist face of existence" because its endless pursuit of similitude conducts into "the dream world in which everything that happens appears not in identical but in similar guise, opaquely similar to one another." Characteristically and paradoxically, Benjamin calls this process both a "distortion" and a revelation of the true face of existence. Surrealism had a certain philosophic authority for him because he regarded with skepticism the coherences and distinct categories of the superficially accessible world constituted by the established social order, entrenched power relations, and conventional mind-sets. Surrealist free association broke down these spurious distinctions and hierarchies and broke through to a perception of startling underlying connectedness. Benjamin strove – ineffectually, I would say – to integrate this surrealist perspective with his Marxism. Its more natural affinity is with his attraction to mysticism, for what it amounts to is a secular, psychologically-based vehicle for the mystic's sense of existence as an infinite series of cosmic correspondences and for the root mystic perception that true reality is always hidden beneath the veil of all that merely meets the eye.

Benjamin's notion of a "prehistoric world" in Kafka is rather more enigmatic. Let me propose that it is a way of defining the weirdly universalizing power of Kafka's parables. If memory in Proust is intensely personal, the expression of a particular complex of experiences and a particular sensibility, it is racial in Kafka. What is at stake in Kafka's writings as Benjamin understands them is our relation as a culture to our whole evolutionary past. In the first and formative instance, the "we" behind this "our" is certainly the Jews, who constructed a civilization on the imperative principle of law, but the Jews are treated as an exemplary case of humanity at large (hence Kafka's fondness for the Chinese as an image of traditional society, the distant and exotic that corresponds to the near and familiar). Kafka's boldness, according to Benjamin, leads him to imagine the primordial confusion and terror of a world before the law, where everything is arbitrary, uncanny, unpredictable. Kafka's imagination, as we know abundantly from the autobiographical documents, stood in absolute tension with the assimilated world of his own father and in a state of estranged, ambivalent fascination with the world of his forefathers. Benjamin's notion of the prehistoric is a way of explaining how Kafka transmuted these specific cultural and biographical circumstances of a modern German-speaking Jew caught between two realms into fiction with a peculiarly universal resonance: "To Kafka, the world of his ancestors was as unfathomable as the world of realities was important for him, and we may be sure that, like the totem poles of primitive people, the

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world of ancestors took him down to the animals."

It is to a certain degree justified but also too facile to say that these two spectacular literary opposites, Proust and Kafka, simply appealed to the two opposite sides of Benjamin's sensibility – on the one hand, his aestheticizing impulse, his love of the opulent and the sensuous, his fascination with society and historical milieu, his attraction to the shimmering perspectives of the inner world; on the other hand, his exegetical and theological imagination, his interest in how doctrine is translated into tradition, his speculative concern with man and speech and meaning against the background of eternity. But there are also a few points of contact between his two contrasting touchstones of modernism. It is surely more than coincidental that both were Jews, one an acutely self-conscious Jew with an active if camouflaged interest in Jewish tradition; the other, a half-Jew raised as a Catholic who had a residual but potent sense of the ambiguous standing in French society entailed by his ancestry. The two thus appealed to the two ends of Benjamin's own wavering spectrum of identity as a Jew: the engaged Jew who aspired to master Hebrew (Kafka made somewhat better progress on this front than Benjamin) and to orient himself in the classic sources and their theological authority, and the vestigial Jew who in most though not all respects was a quintessential European, perhaps more European than others by virtue of the hint of marginality. It is perfectly appropriate that Benjamin should make a good deal of the Jewish character of Kafka's writing – much to the distress of his friend Brecht – and not invoke the Jewish background at all in the case of Proust. Yet if both were founders and dissolvers of a genre, the radicalism of their literary enterprise might well be energized by their location as outsiders (a much more painful and extreme predicament, of course, for Kafka, who constantly monitored and reinforced his own marginality, and who was actuated by the consciousness of being an outsider to Jewish tradition as well as to European culture). If modernity as Benjamin imagined it, tracing a literary genealogy back to Baudelaire, involved the erosion of experience, a sense of alienation, the dissolution of aura, the displacement of communal wisdom by the perplexity of the individual, Kafka and Proust, at very different removes from the ancestral Jewish realm, were in a position as transitional Jews to experience this set of interrelated losses with exemplary acuteness and also to nurture what Benjamin called in relation to Proust a "homesickness," though each conceived the longed-for home in very different terms.

Benjamin clearly construed the sickness component of homesickness quite literally, as one can infer from his famous image of Proust lying in bed racked with longing for a remembered world, and from his observation that Proust's serpentine sentences are the perfect rhythmic expression

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of the novelist's asthma. Of Kafka's illness, psychological and somatic, he makes very little, though it can hardly have escaped his attention. It is surely noteworthy that Benjamin's two exemplary modernists are two of the most spectacularly neurotic writers in the modern pantheon. (There is no necessary connection between their neuroses and their Jewishness, unless one chooses to invoke the view of classic Zionism about the inevitable abnormalcy of the Diaspora Jew.) Neither was capable of negotiating the physical and emotional trials of everyday life; each found a crippling respiratory focus for his psychological vulnerability – asthma for one, tuberculosis for the other – which would eventually prove lethal. But there was more at stake in all this for Benjamin than some generalized notion of art and neurosis. Sometimes neurosis interferes with art or is tangential to it. What is extraordinary about the genius of both Kafka and Proust is that each, in rather different ways, exploited neurosis as a powerfully concentrating vehicle of artistic vision; they were able to exert a kind of sublime cunning in using their special condition of sickness as a privileged vantage point from which to view the general condition of humankind. Their ability to generate imaginative authority from neurosis would have appealed to Benjamin on both personal and theoretical grounds. He was himself an emotionally troubled intellectual, with his own somatic weak-point (a chronic heart condition), a man drawn to the idea of suicide for a decade before the circumstances of the Nazi occupation led him to take his own life. But beyond such biographical considerations, he more than once represented modernity as a condition of cultural sickness, and thus it is not surprising that he should have been attracted to these two novelists who made out of their sickness an exacting and innovative literary art which answered the special circumstances of loss and estrangement of the modern age.

I should like to show how Kafka and Proust respectively transform a *topos* of the nineteenth-century novel. Both, it should be said, went to school with some of the same nineteenth-century masters, Flaubert and probably Balzac as well looming large for both, and Dickens having an obvious importance for Kafka and exerting some influence (as Edmund Wilson argued, comparing the Verdurins with the Veneerings from *Our Mutual Friend*) on the satiric aspects of Proust. A key modality of the nineteenth-century novel is the deployment of ocular inspection ("description" seems to me too pale and inert a term). Because it is the common assumption of the writers that the world is there to be explored, penetrated, mastered, explained, in the first instance by novelistic representation through the omniscient narrator, in the second instance by the protagonist pursuing his *Bildung* or his social ascent, there are abundant

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passages in which the narrator or the protagonist halts before the façade of an imposing building or at the threshold of an unfamiliar interior and inspects it, through attention to minute detail and with the interpretive pressure of metaphor, as the social-thematic-psychological space he or she is about to enter. We might recall Dickens's representation of the exterior of Marshelsea Prison near the beginning of *Little Dorrit*, or Pip's first perception of Miss Havisham's grand and musty house in *Great Expectations*, or the plebian Lucien's initial view of the interior of the de Bargeton château in *Lost Illusions*, or Emma Bovary taking in the array of ancestral portraits as she mounts the great staircase of the château at Vaubyessard. It is instructive to keep this general background in mind as one notes the disorienting oddness of K.'s first clear sighting – or as much of a clear sighting as he will get – of the Castle. Benjamin had contended in his essay on the storyteller, "To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life." That is a suggestive half-truth (as are many of his aphorisms) which needs to be qualified by the fact that nineteenth-century novelists in their very techniques of representation quite often evinced a supreme confidence in the "communicability of experience," which Benjamin associated with the storyteller as opposed to the novelist. But Kafka represents the ultimate implementation of the baffled narrative epistemology that Benjamin saw beginning in Cervantes, and K.'s view of the Castle vividly demonstrates how far the genre had traveled in the eight or so decades since the peak achievements of Balzac:

> Now he could see the Castle above him, clearly defined in the glittering air, its outline made still more definite by the thin layer of snow covering up everything. There seemed to be much less snow up there on the hill than down in the village, where K. found progress as laborious as on the main road the previous day. Here the heavy snowdrifts reached right up to the cottage windows and began again on the low roofs, but up on the hill everything soared light and free into the air, or at least so it appeared from below.
>
> On the whole this distant prospect of the Castle satisfied K.'s expectations. It was neither an old stronghold nor a new mansion, but a rambling pile consisting of innumerable small buildings closely packed together and of one or two stories; if K. had not known that it was a castle he might have taken it for a little town. There was only one tower as far as he could see; whether it belonged to a dwelling-house or a church he could not determine. Swarms of crows were circling round it.

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K.'s stance as observer from below looking above is continuous with that of Pip, Lucien, and Emma. The representation of the act of observation, like almost everything in Kafka, has a deceptive surface clarity. The object of observation, however, for all its seeming to be "clearly defined in the glittering air," begins to dissolve in a welter of contradictions, the process of deconstruction enacted with an imaginative power that makes it far more interesting than any of its programmatic formulations by contemporary theorists. There is perhaps a hint of a violation of meteorological probability in the contrast between the snowdrifted village and the lightly snowdusted Castle. In any case, the Castle does not present any coherent structure that is really accessible to ocular inspection; unlike the façades and interiors of nineteenth-century fiction, it resists the gaze. It is neither one thing nor the other, neither old nor new, neither stronghold nor mansion, but rather a helter-skelter collection of indeterminate structures. The most subversive collapse of the binary oppositions that generally give us a handle on reality is that the Castle proves to be disconcertingly like the Village: "If K. had not known that it was a castle he might have taken it for a little town"; and in the next paragraph after the passage I have quoted, ". . . it was after all only a wretched-looking town, a huddle of village houses." This perception rather oddly triggers in K. a memory of his native village, the longest piece of recollection in the novel for this man who is virtually without a past, suggesting that the most intent observation may amount to little more than the projection of memory. The narrative technique Kafka uses (after an abortive experiment in early drafts with first-person narration) is one he inherited from the mainline of nineteenth-century realism – *style indirect libre*, or narrated monologue. But where his predecessors had used that technique to work out a rich interplay of narratorial authority and intense subjective experience, in Kafka it is repeatedly used for epistemological ends, to expose beneath the sheerest veil of ostensible narratorial authority the radical dubiety of subjective perception. "Seemed" and "appeared," as in our passage, are the keywords of Kafka's world, constantly opening perspectives to epistemological vertigo. Such a perspective yawns menacingly in K.'s view of the Castle (at the end of the paragraph following our excerpt) when his usually non-figurative language is abandoned as the narrator speaks of a "maniacal glitter" in the sun-reflecting windows of the Castle's tower, and its irregular battlements "as if designed by the trembling or careless hand of a child . . . as if a melancholy-mad tenant who ought to have been kept in the topmost chamber of the house had burst through the roof and lifted himself up to the gaze of the world."

When the Castle is thus dominated by an image of the madman in the attic – an imagined nexus of violence, incarceration, dementia, the

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senseless or chaotic activity of a child – we are no longer sure whether there is a world out there that the self is observing or whether the self is constructing the world out of the misshapen materials of its own most alienated and uncontrolled elements. The literary representation of ontological, psychological, or social alienation is of course common to several currents of modernism, but it is given a quite different – literally inimitable, I think – sense in Kafka for two reasons into which Benjamin has shrewd insight. There is something eerily archetypal in the vista of the Castle seem from the Village below, crows circling about its single visible tower against the bright background of the chill winter sky. It is this haunting archetypicality that Benjamin addresses, in his aggressively cryptic fashion, by speaking of the prehistoric character of Kafka's world. The historically contextualized moment when the Young Man from the Provinces arrived at the gates of manor or castle or grand metropolis in the nineteenth-century novel has been transmuted by Kafka into an immemorial scene: a man from elsewhere, confronting the folk in the village, who dwell under the shadow of the domain above inhabited by those presumed to rule their lives. On the surface, this world possesses the accoutrements of civilization in the historical era: people certainly know how to write, there is even a telephone link, however questionable its efficacy, between Castle and Village, so that we feel we are partly in the Middle Ages, partly in the early twentieth century with its new technology and characteristic bureaucracy. But underneath, this is an archaic world because through the compulsively skeptical figure of K. everything is called into question about its system of governance and restraints. Existence is imagined as though the supposedly civilizing law were not a given but an arbitrary and perhaps corrupt imposition on the unmanageable chaos that is the real constitution of things as they were experienced in the prehistoric age. K.'s vocation of land-surveying is a desperate joke, for there are no dependable demarcations in this world. It is no wonder that man easily descends into animal or that the animal erupts in man, as in the animalistic or pet-like Assistants or in the act of sex between K. and Frieda, where "like dogs desperately tearing up the ground, they tore at each other's body."

What is equally peculiar about Kafka's fiction is that all this chaos is conveyed with the calmest, most scrupulous deliberation, with a talmudic patience of dialectical attention. Benjamin highlights this aspect of Kafka, especially in his essay-letter to Scholem, by the emphasis he places on the role of the Jewish ideal of learning in Kafka. I think he recognizes, at least implicitly, that such learning is manifested both as an elaborated theme – especially, I would say, in the shorter ficton – and in the *manner* of Kafka's narrators and the mental habits of his characters. The self-alienated Kafka

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protagonist "might understand himself," Benjamin writes, "but what an enormous effort would be required! It is a tempest that blows from the land of oblivion, and learning is a cavalry attack against it." Benjamin's image here is almost the same as the famous one he would use two years later to describe Paul Klee's *Novus Angelus* as the angel of history blown backward by a wind from Eden into the ruined landscape of future events. A cavalry attack on a tempest is of course an exercise in futility, though one that expresses a heroic impulse. The persistence of the ideal of learning in Kafka's desperate world – always nevertheless hoping for hope – is just this sort of quixotic heroism. Meanings may be indefinitely withheld; the law may be no more than a bureaucrat's whim, a banal official directive, or a scrambled telephone message. The engines of interpretation, however, grind on, imparting to the fictional world an almost consoling hum of dynamic process; for it is a supremely human act to continue to seek meaning, even against all odds, and Kafka's ultimate intuition is that this has been the characteristically Jewish response to the most abysmal revelations of life in history.

Kafka and Proust share a painfully acute self-absorption. "Since the spiritual exercises of Loyola," Benjamin observes of Proust, "there has hardly been a more radical attempt at self-absorption." In Kafka, however, the self-absorption is projected onto objects, events, agencies, and persons in the protagonist's environment, for he desperately needs to find some clue to who he is and where he needs to go – in Benjamin's formulation, he seeks to "encounter fragments of his own existence" – in whatever he finds all around him. In Proust, on the other hand, the vector of self-absorption points in the opposite direction, from the world to the self. In a process of alchemical transmutation through language – which in Proust is always a dense refractive medium, not a seeming transparency as in Kafka – the world is absorbed by the self, steeped in the strange and magical luminosities of mental association and memory. Kafka's world, shrinking beneath the looming shadow of the father, is a realm of acts, obligations, commands, and their interpretation. Proust's world, ultimately oriented by the polar star of the longed-for mother, seeks to reconstitute the bliss of primal unity in the orchestrated harmonies of art and in the sense of grace vouchsafed through memory. "The intonation of Proust's voice," Benjamin notes in an approving allusion to an essay by Cocteau, "obeyed the laws of night and honey."

In Proust's novel, then, the "sightings" of landscapes, architectural silhouettes, façades and interiors of buildings do not represent the vista as a space to penetrate or a sphere to contend with but as a stimulus for the aesthetic imagination. Let us recall one of the most famous of these sightings, the youthful protagonist's view from a moving carriage of the three

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steeples in "Combray":

> At a bend in the road I experienced, suddenly, that special pleasure which was unlike any other, on catching sight of the twin steeples of Martinville, bathed in the setting sun and constantly changing their position with the movement of the carriage and the windings of the road, and then of a third steeple, that of Vieuxvicq, which, although separated from them by a hill and a valley, and rising from higher ground in the distance, appeared none the less to be standing by their side.
>
> In noticing and registering the shape of their spires, their shifting lines, the sunny warmth of their surfaces, I felt that I was not penetrating to the core of my impression, that something more lay behind that nobility, something which they seemed at once to contain and to conceal.

The debt of this particular mode of visual attention to impressionist painting – the shifting nature of the object of perception as light changes and the position of the observer shifts – is obvious. The distinctively Proustian component, strongly encouraged by the verbal medium of representation, is the mysticism of consciousness, the sense that there is a hidden inner core (*un bout*) of the impression, something "behind" the surface loveliness it takes in, which the observer needs to penetrate.

A brief while later in narrated time, on the trip home from Martinville, the boy cranes his neck to retain a backward glimpse of the steeples in the rapidly gathering dusk that now turns their silhouettes black, until they disappear around a bend in the road:

> I was obliged, in default of other company, to fall back on my own, and to attempt to recapture the vision of my steeples. And presently their outlines and their sunlit surfaces, as though they had been a sort of rind, peeled away; something of what they had concealed from me became apparent; a thought came into my mind which had not existed for me a moment earlier, framing itself in words in my head; and the pleasure which the first sight of them had given me was so greatly enhanced that, overpowered by a sort of intoxication, I could no longer think of anything else.

Another way of defining the difference between Kafka's paternal world and Proust's maternal one is the difference between the quest for knowledge and the quest for pleasure. (One should note, though, that

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there is also a dialectically opposite impulse in Proust – to derive from observation, as the narrator says several times, the general laws of human behavior. "Happiness alone is salutary for the body," he observes in the last volume of the novel, "but it is sorrow that develops the mind's powers.") Benjamin, rather unusually for a critic, was impelled toward both horizons, playing out the role of the austere exegete (he fantasized that he would master Hebrew and become a latter-day Ibn Ezra) and allured by the bright colored lights of ecstatic consciousness, in surrealist free association and in his experience with hashish. In the three steeples passage, the young observer feels keen pleasure in first seeing the spires, but the inward reconstruction of the initial vision, which somehow manages to "peel away" the rind of external appearances, intensifies that pleasure into rapture, in compliance with "the laws of night and honey." Mysticism, of a peculiarly hedonistic character, is, I think, a term that has more than loose application to this whole process. There is something elusive – in the strict theological sense, ineffable – about the perception of the steeples and why it should produce such happiness. It surely has much to do with the sudden, unexpected gift of perceived pattern, a pattern shifting kaleidoscopically as the position of the observer changes: the two that become three and the three that constitute an exquisite constellation are a kind of model of how haunting aesthetic patterns are formed. Perhaps the elevated emotion invested in the steeples is reinforced by their actual association with the realm of the sacred. The narrator picks up a distant visual signal, the reflected light of the late afternoon sun on the steeples, identifying it as a kind of sensuous abstraction, *ensoleillement* – "sunniness" or "sun-irradiation" – whose essence he needs to penetrate.

All immediate pleasure, however, is ephemeral: this recognition lies at the root of the psychology of desire to which Proust devotes so many hundreds of pages. The steeples have scarcely been sighted, coming and going, when they disappear from view, and the narrator, perched on the box of the carriage but isolated from the coachman next to him, is driven back on his own resources of memory and art to recapture what he has seen. The inner core of the vision he now manages to apprehend intoxicates him because it involves an intuition that he can bind the fleeting prospect of bliss in a chain of images (a process Benjamin stresses) and catch it in the fixative of language (the linguistic dimension is perhaps insufficiently represented in Benjamin's account). As the narrator goes on to say, "What lay hidden behind the steeples of Martinville must be something analogous to a pretty phrase, since it was in the form of words which gave me pleasure that it had appeared to me." Though there are surely no kabbalistic influences at work here, a mysticism that is largely linguistic, in which words have hallucinogenic power, would have been a

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familiar and understandable phenomenon for Benjamin, the friend and intellectual confidant of Scholem. Proust's protagonist, still seated on the box of the moving carriage, borrows pencil and paper and produces a paragraph of description that constitutes his first documented response to his vocation as a writer. The prose he makes out of the vision of the steeples is perhaps a little naive and clearly more conventional than the prose of the mature Proust, but there is also marked continuity between the two. What most evidently links the young Marcel (if that is his name) with the magisterial novelist is the spectacular role of the image in his paragraph. First, the steeples appear before him "like three birds perched upon the plain"; then, in the backward view on the way home, as the road twists, "they veered in the evening light like three golden pivots." Finally, at the last moment he is able to glimpse them, in the far distance of falling darkness, they seem

> no more now than three flowers painted upon the sky above the low line of the fields. They made me think, too, of three maidens in a legend, abandoned in a solitary place over which night had begun to fall; and as we drew away from them at a gallop, I could see them timidly seeking their way, and after some awkward, stumbling movements of their noble silhouettes, drawing close to one another, gliding one behind another, forming now against the still rosy sky no more than a single dusky shape, charming and resigned, and so vanishing in the night.

The young protagonist's little composition offers a lucid illustration, in somewhat simplified form, of the phenomenon Benjamin described as the breaking-through of "the true surrealist face of existence" by virtue of the Proustian image. The ostensible aim of the passage is mimetic, and there is even an elegantly mimetic rhythmic movement (more accomplished in the French original) in the last sentence that catches the vanishing of the steeples into the night. But the images, however self-consciously deployed by the neophyte writer as a exercise in description, carry us somewhere beyond mimesis. The first two similes do seem largely efforts to catch the affecting look of the steeples – three perching birds, then three turning golden pivots. The concluding pair of similes, however, manifest a more free-associative impulse, something even indicated rhetorically by the phrase that introduces the last comparison, "They made me think, too, of three maidens in a legend." The three steeples are now not merely represented through art but translated from the realm of experience into a realm of artifice, three flowers painted on

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the sky, which thus is implicitly transformed into a vast canvas. In the final image, as a nexus of metonymy leads from flowers to maidens, the steeples are slipped out of the real landscape into the evocative realm of legend or fairytale – three young women abandoned in the woods, drawing together in a delicate choreography until they form a single silhouette in the descending darkness.

The free play of imaging through the medium of language is the chief reason for the intoxication Marcel experiences, and for his secular-mystic sense that he has succeeded in breaking through the surface of what he has seen to something essential that lies hidden behind it. Ordinary existence as Proust conceives it is, no less than for Kafka, a condition of alienation, exile, separation from origins. In the realm of desire, this condition is felt in the individual's estrangement, either actual or constantly threatened, from the object of desire. In the realm of perception, it is manifested in a rasping sense of inescapable distance between the perceiver and the thing perceived. Proust formulates this perceptual distance brilliantly in one of his most beautiful similes:

> When I saw an external object, my consciousness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, surrounding it with a thin spiritual border that prevented me from ever touching its substance directly; for it would somehow evaporate before I could make contact with it, just as an incandescent body that is brought into proximity with something wet never actually touches its moisture, since it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation.

Let me note that this extraordinary image, which is typical of a whole category of Proustian figures, has nothing to do with the purportedly surrealist function of images about which Benjamin speaks. The Proustian image, as here, is often intricately analytic and thus *discursive*, a subtle instrument for separating and sorting and explaining the conceptual layers of phenomena. Benjamin, with his own bias toward modernist epiphanies, stresses the revelatory and free-associative Proust and scarcely deals with Proust the brilliant analyst.

In the instance of the three spires, it is hard to see how the young protagonist's descriptive similes enable him to touch the substance of the object of perception, though the image he chooses of peeling away a rind and reaching a hidden core suggests that is what he feels he has done. Here Benjamin's tightly packed characterization of Proust as "racked with homesickness . . . for the world distorted in the state of resemblance" may be helpful. To see the steeples as birds, pivots, flowers, and maidens is to

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grasp a kind of exalting illusion of having made contact with their hidden essence because a sense is created that the mind is no longer estranged from the world it apprehends, having entered through the image into a realm of mobile, perhaps infinite, connectedness. The concatenation of resemblances, the metamorphoses of the image with their power to suffuse the object with associations of beauty, value, and pleasure – birds, flowers, maidens, gold – become an equivalent of "home," which I suspect ultimately means for Proust that primal experience of connectedness, the mother's embrace.

One hardly wants to deny that Kafka and Proust are antithetical figures on the map of modernism, nor does one want to resist the obvious perception that their appeal for Benjamin marks the antipodes of his critical sensibility. It is nevertheless instructive that he should have seen a certain nostalgia at the root of their very different impulses to dissolve and create genres. In both cases, it is a rigorously unsentimental nostalgia, though the objects are different – for Proust, a lost primal unity; for Kafka, a lost tradition, a time when law and observer, text and interpreter, were united in certainty. In both cases, the act of writing provides a brilliant if desperate compensation for the vanished world of origins, though the brilliance is paramount for Proust, the desperation for Kafka. It is a critical commonplace to associate modernism with iconoclasm, whether the iconoclastic impulse is an expression of alienation and emotional incoherence (T. S. Eliot) or of exuberant refurbishing of literary form for a new age (Joyce). Benjamin's distinctive insight into Proust and Kafka is that their iconoclasm was an artistically innovative strategy for holding onto a consoling vestige of something precious from the past, whether personal or cultural, that was otherwise irrevocably lost. There is a resonant doubleness in Benjamin's own sense of modernity. He was excited by the revolutionary possibilities of the new technologies of representation – especially photography and cinema – at the same time that he saw them as catalysts of the sundry processes of human self-alienation and the breakdown of community he associated with urbanization, industrialization, commodification, and secularization. The most heterodox of Marxists, he was drawn to the transcendent realm of mysticism both early and late in his career, and he cherished the idea of tradition as the agency for the transmission of immemorial wisdom. Himself a thoroughly Europeanized Jew who intermittently contemplated the notion of a return to Jewish sources, Benjamin was in a peculiarly advantaged position to imagine Kafka and Proust, the tortuously self-conscious and the residual Jew, as masters of the impossible return, modernists who created the compelling novelty of the new century's literature out of the acuteness of their longing for a world that had gone before it.

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FICTION

STEPHEN DIXON

Moon

One last one. To the moon. Goes outside, first leaves his wife in bed. She was reading while he was reading, fell asleep with her glasses on and holding the book to her chest. He took the glasses off, book away, held her head while he took out the pillows it had been against and laid them flat and rested her head on them. Two she likes to sleep with; he, one. Then shut the light and went outside. Has no clothes on. None needed. Kids sound asleep – he knows for he told them a story and then sang to them till they fell asleep and sat ten more minutes in their room drinking his drink. House in a remote area, not even lights from other houses can be seen and they almost have a three hundred-sixty-degree view of the hills around them, valleys, and so on. Way off, maybe five miles, a light-house light in the bay below. So: naked, nice out, cool but not so cool where he's cold, more than a week before they have to leave this rented house, little breeze, sound of insects – crickets, cicadas, one of those, maybe another – sound of breezes through trees, every now and then loons in the lake about a mile away which he can now see only because it's moonlit. So he's outside and looks up at the moon. Full face, no hair, nice face, cloud suddenly on top of it like a cheap toupee, toupee blown away. Then face way he best likes to see it: open and clear. Moon, he thinks. I've never really spoken to you. I still haven't. "Moon, I was just now thinking," he says, "I've never really spoken to you before, never have at all that I can remember, and my memory's pretty good, very good, nobody I know has a better one, so I haven't spoken to you, period, far as I can remember, at least not aloud. So what do I want to say to you? What was I leading up to with that long intro? Something, that I know – way you light up the night and how good it looks and makes me feel? Maybe that but much more. But it's so bright tonight I can almost read out here from your light. If I had a book with me, which I left on my bed. Not that I would read; I'd just look and at anything but the book if I'd brought it along. Anyway, what do you say to what I just said? Any

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to all of it, just that I want to speak to you but really, though I thought I had something, don't know what to say. Silly, I know, or another word, but if you can, do." Waits. "I'm serious. I'd love an answer from you of any recognizable kind. That means . . . but I don't think I have to tell you." Cups his ear, aims it at the moon, listens. "Or could be you speak so low I can't hear you. Or one has to make an appointment to speak with you since so many may want to. That it? Well of course you can't answer if it was: the necessary appointment first. You might not even be listening. But you'd have to be if one did have to make an appointment to speak to you, but forget it, all to most of that. To be safe: all." Thinks: Why my talking so ridiculously? Moon making me do it: full, and calm face that makes me nervous, besides the heavenly night? From now on just look at the moon, forget talking to it, because you also might wake one of the family. Looks. Nice round face, round nice face, some cultures – no, don't start saying what some other cultures see in the configurations of the moon that we see as a face. Rabbits, monkeys, one culture, just the profile of a duck. But he told himself not to say. Just look, see what comes from that. Does. It's a nice sight, that's all. Meaning: that's plenty, more than plenty, so what more can he say? Nice sight, nice round face, in ways there can be nothing more beautiful anywhere at any time than this kind of night with this kind of light. Bright, clear, full moon, stars, no other light but from that lighthouse five or so miles away, perfect weather so to speak, perfect night so to speak, every now and then bird sounds, loons, steady clicks and hum of harmless insects, no planes, no disturbances, no natural or manmade rumblings, beautiful view, everything perfect so to speak, his health good, life with his wife very good, kids healthy and fine and sound asleep, rest of the world's what it is but most of it now seems at peace. Things seems to be going relatively well almost everywhere right now, better in the universe that he knows than at any time he's known it. This is a great moment, these have been great minutes, everything near to being perfect as things can come near to being that, so to speak, mind alive, active, excited, enthusiastic, he feels good, he doesn't know how he could ever feel better, if he went to bed now and felt like sex he's sure no matter how tired his wife was she'd comply. But he could fall asleep with her or alone on that chaise longue there and it would feel as good. There are no threats, demands, regrets, nothing he wants, right now everything's right, what more could he want than this night, what more any other day or night could he want? So this is the end then. The end. This is it, so to speak. Can't think of anything else. Can't speak. Stares for a long time at the moon. Minutes. Tries to see if he can stare at it without anything coming into his head. Things come but nothing much. Feels so damn good, feels at peace. Then gets a little tired

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on his feet and with just staring at the moon and the moon seeming to stay in place and just about everything else around him seeming the same, and heads for the house, thinks should I stay out a few more minutes, a single minute, thirty seconds then to see if anything else comes into his head. Do. Does. Minutes, looks at the moon. Sits on the chaise longue. Nothing else comes. No other good thoughts, he means. And even more tired now, so goes inside, pees, not because he has to but so he doesn't have to get up later when he's much sleepier in bed, gets into bed, close to his wife, she's on her side, he feels – can't see much of her because the moon's on the other side of the house and doesn't give off much light on this one, so he'd want that, moon to be on this side shining through the window here, where he can see it and his wife on her side, his wife nude with the covers off and on her side, the curves that look like lots of things, hills, mountains, valleys, dunes, the moon and various phases of it, where he can wake up his wife and make love with her to moonlight, start to make love by moving his hands along the valleys and dunes and then make full love, from behind, below, the side, atop, where the moon's face can watch them so to speak, or rather take part in or contribute to that lovemaking in several ways he'll say, just that they know it's watching so to speak and they're doing it to its light. "Moon," he says, softly so she can't hear, "come on to the other side of the house so you can give us some light." Moon does. Suddenly it's there. There's no way anyone can describe the moon the way it is now – a bauble, a ball, a cheap ear pendant, a globe or lantern or round yellow squash or fruit, none of those work, moon's just there, all the light he needs. He wakes his wife by saying her name several times. She says, "What?" Did it also by shaking her shoulder gently. He says, "A miracle." She says, "What?" He says, "You asking what miracle or just what?" "What?" Back's to him, all those curves. He glides his hand over them and gets his mouth up to her exposed ear and says, "I asked the moon to come to this side of the house so I could see it and see you and your body and everything and it did." "What moon? What side?" "The moon; there's only one; the moon." "Where I mean? Why'd you wake me?" "To make love to you to moonlight." "That's nice," she says, "and you know me, always game," and moves her head around so they can kiss. After they do she looks past his face and says, "I don't see any moon." "You don't?" He turns around – back's been to the window – and looks outside. He sees it, right out there, framed by the window, just the moon in a totally cloudless dark sky, how can't she see? "You don't see what I see?" he says. "If it's the moon you say you're seeing, no I can't." "But it's there." "Where?" "Oh well, I thought I had powers." " Let's go outside then if you want to make love by moonlight," she says. "That is what you want

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to do, right?" "With, but I'll take without. But we don't have a bed out there and the grass will be wet and even if we brought two or three blankets to lie on, they'd soon be soaked through." "The chaise longue of course." "It's too narrow. One of us can barely lie on it straight." "We don't have to do it the same old way," she says. "It's warm here." "We'll be warm, don't worry. But if you don't want to, fine, but I'm ready. I thought you'd try while I was reading." "I was reading too and I didn't think you wanted to." "Come," she says. She gets out of bed, grabs his hand. "Take a couple of blankets," she says. He takes them off the bed and goes outside with her. Moon's there, full, bright, little beard this time instead of a toupee. Beard disappears and then it's just a beatific face again or what looks to him like one. "Sit," she says. He does, where she tells him to, at the end of the chaise longue. She sits on him, facing him. They do it this way. At the end they both howl. Moon disappears at almost that exact moment. "Clouds," he says after. "Shame," she says.

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HENRY H. ROTH

Style

When I was little, I was always surprised to see my father return home daily from work. I was certain he had better places to go. Mumbling to himself, dialing frantically and shouting orders into a phone, impatient with everyone around him, father seemed restless and never happy in our spacious apartment.

Eventually, a small unused bedroom was converted into an office where he paced back and forth like a caged animal, devising plans to increase the productivity of his thriving men's-sportswear firm.

My older brother Charles and I never ventured too close to our father. And we were never invited into his new office. We did garner much loving attention from our gentle mother, but she was to die before she was forty. With her death, we lost our only ally.

Mother smiled a lot; father occasionally grinned but rarely smiled and never laughed, because he considered the world serious business. He'd shake hands, bid goodnight, and march off to his lair, happy to be rid of us. I can't recall relatives or friends dropping in to visit our parents. It was a somber childhood. Charles always had great difficulty sleeping. And he'd keep me up late at night tossing out pessimistic comments about our chances of survival.

"Pop would pay us plenty to run away and keep away. Mom won't let him, of course, so he can only dream about his master plan."

Now my father is seventy. I am forty. My brother is forty-six. Father calls me once a week for a briefing. Once every two months, he strolls over for dinner with his third wife, a timid lanky woman with thick glasses, spindly legs, and a harsh voice, to dine at my cluttered apartment. As always, father, though charming to my family, is mostly distracted and annoyed whenever locked in a family situation.

Years have passed. Charles is completely out of the picture. Father will tolerate no mention of my brother. Jailed twice for major financial indiscretions, Charles is about to be prosecuted in Denver on new embezzling charges.

I long to bring up my brother's name at our infrequent gatherings, but my family has been won over by the old man, who brings flowers to Laura and thoughtful toys to Tom and Gregg. Father would have a major tantrum if I revealed Charles's latest mess and I'd be judged by all present

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as a cruel bully. So I grumpily make small talk and impatiently wait for him and his skittish wife to leave.

I rarely call my father. He never invites us to his apartment a few blocks away. Everything is acted out on his terms. We both appear satisfied with this relationship.

Laura strongly disagrees. "He admires you, but he can't say it or show it. You give him no easy openings."

I usually counter, "Look, I'm an Assistant Professor of Philosophy. My fate is far better than poor Charles's, but father can't possibly admire me."

"You're wrong."

"He'd never take the time to find out who I am."

"Your father's afraid of you."

"He fears no one."

"He's sure you don't really like him. And he doesn't know what to do about it."

"Oh, a man of action can always act out his feelings. Let's stop debating!"

She pursues, "He's old and he loves you."

I shrug, "Father always warned that you always get what you pay for."

She continues, "You circle each other like prizefighters! It's so sad."

I didn't respond any more, because if we keep sparring a real fight will ensue. Usually I pick up a book and begin to scan it. Laura makes a lot of noise stacking dishes into the dishwasher. The boys are asleep. Once I've calmed down, I'm proud and astounded that somehow I've come up with a family, a predictable life.

It's only by default that I'm the favored son. Charles's jail sentences propelled him out of the family chronicle. Father treated my brother as if he'd been an orphan who by good fortune lodged with us on Madison Avenue and Eighty-Eighth Street. But when he erred, and for very good reason lost favor, Charles was banished forever from the kingdom.

Besides his vindictive wrath, father never accepted loss. Mother's death stunned him for several weeks. Then father pranced away from pain and sorrow, blaming everyone for the violent cancer that galloped across her body.

Father sued the surgeon; he accused the hospital staff of indifferent care. He lectured to Charles, then twenty, about how mother had been devastated by his criminal antics. Father revealed how much mother worried about my daydreaming and my refusal to admit that there was a tough and lousy world out there.

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After mother's death, we all lived an uneasy truce. Father kept writing checks to defray Charles's latest handiwork – slashed tires, busted school windows, and illegal sale of firecrackers.

I'd concealed my loneliness and excelled in school. It was a feat which did not impress Charles or my father. I would end up teaching philosophy in half-empty classrooms. Though appalled by my profession, father never severed relations with me.

Charles was never fortunate. He is a pain in the ass and many times I've wished he'd journey further than Denver. But he is my brother, the only witness and true companion of my childhood. He was kind and protective of me. He is all I have of the past. I need him. Since father knew nothing of Charles's recent troubles, I have posted the bill for the defense lawyers who will fail my brother just as we all have.

Just after my eighteenth birthday Charles pushed open the bedroom door, flopped on my unmade bed and pulled out a joint. I shook my head in annoyance.

"Don't be so negative," Charles squinted at me.

"Right," I said disgustedly, "and get your shoes off my pillow."

Charles was a chubby, spoiled-looking young man. Pimples crisscrossed his wide forehead. He still looked like a rumpled teenager.

"You're not a bad kid after all," Charles admitted. "Still, pop doesn't care much for you either."

"C'mon," I said nervously.

I couldn't wait for my last year of high school to end. By late summer I'd be in a college far away from my joyless home. And be free of Charles's latest misdemeanors and having to bear father's new wife. Unhappy and uncomfortable being alone, father had married six months after our mother's death.

Mabel was a tiny bewildered woman who spent most of her time out of the apartment shopping or serving on committees. Father had strongly hinted Mabel was on the way out. We neither cared one way or the other. Father was very disappointed in this wife who yessed him to death. Father demanded acquiescence, but enjoyed some zesty combat to attain his goals. Charles was not surprised by any of father's actions.

"First mom, then poor Mabel! See, pop writes people off easily. He's a first-class hit man. Out of sight, out of mind," he said bitterly.

I became uneasy.

"That's really taking it to the max, Charles."

Charles replied in a half whisper, "There's no room for love in him or anywhere he lives."

When Charles began to sob, I turned away. Then he ran out of the

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room.

With Charles more determined than ever to cheat others, shrewd authorities began to pay closer attention to him. Cursed with a sloppy thieving style, my brother was easily snared and dealt harshly with.

During my senior college year I flew home to join my father as glum spectators to Charles's first incarceration.

Charles, tiny and very frightened, was dispatched to Rikers Island for nine months by an oafish-looking judge in wrinkled robes. We darted from the rank-smelling Bronx Courthouse and entered the first dingy restaurant we saw.

Father, already denying the event, and beginning to plot Charles' permanent exile, said nothing about what had just transpired. He stared furiously at his chicken salad platter. His hands twitched.

He shouted at me, "Now Charles is a jailbird. He must be very pleased!"

I felt dizzy, sipped my ice water and hoped to wait the tirade out. But father's outburst was quickly over. Now he ate quickly. He left no food on his plate.

After I ate half my tuna melt sandwich and drank the good coffee, I announced loudly, "I told Charles I'd stand behind him. He kept asking where you were, why you hadn't visited."

Father pointed a finger at me. "Your brother will hide behind you. He'll feed off you. And he'll steal. Don't be a fool."

"I'm not a fool," I yelled back.

"Good," he snapped.

People stared at us. We didn't care. My father was livid.

"I won't tolerate fools or criminals," he warned, looking much older and weary and dangerous.

He left. Leaving me to pay the check and having to use more mundane transportation than his fat Cadillac back to Manhattan. Charles's future was clear. Father would be his failed son's hit man. Everything had changed. I would never return to my father's apartment. Father would remarry again. I would find a woman who loved me. My brother, who had no options, eventually headed west once released from prison.

I sat at the chipped table in the noisy restaurant and hastily scribbled a poem about my father, my brother, and me. I wrote it on a stained paper napkin my father had left near his empty plate. I could barely read my shaky handwriting. I was trembling. I knew the poem was corny and unfocused. Father would've mocked my sophomoric impulse. But it was the best I could do. It was the best I could ever manage.

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Recently I saw my father walking along Madison Avenue. He walked briskly, never delaying half a step to admire a store window display or an attractive woman. He was, as usual, on a specific mission, and there was never time for stray considerations.

On a whim, I followed him. Then I noticed father was preoccupied; he didn't try to beat the light. He studied the faultless blue sky for a moment and patiently waited for the light to change again. He kept looking at his watch, but was daydreaming. He kept patting at his sports jacket as if reassuring himself he still had a heart. I called over to him. He walked swiftly away, pretending he hadn't heard me. Something was awry. Perhaps he was meeting another elderly woman. Deceit and betrayal had been added to his baggage. I was the child suddenly being granted insight and power that were always there for the taking. I kept calling out.

Finally, my father stopped. He was a little confused. I almost expected him to throw his hands up in the air.

"What's the big hurry?" I challenged.

He suddenly smiled. Since it was an unnatural grimace, it seemed to pain him. Still, he smiled again. Startled, I was sorry I'd pestered him.

"Well," my father confessed, "you're right. I'm running late for class." He coughed nervously.

"Class?"

"Yeah," he said sharply.

"What class?" I asked, in sudden annoyance.

"Fiction writing," he said.

"You're writing fiction," I almost shouted.

"I don't like the essay form," my amazing father declared.

"Oh," I said dumbly.

"Fiction is so much more open-ended," he insisted. "We read a lot of Chekhov and Babel. What great writers!"

I nodded sadly.

"I've written a story," he confessed. "I'm bringing it in today to class."

He patted the jacket again and reaching inside it pulled out a folder. Then he delicately hid the work again. I waited as I often have, all my life.

"The class is over today," he blurted out. "The teacher is very professional. We're all beginners. He reads all our work out loud and we discuss it in class. Today my story'll be discussed."

He rubbed his dry lips.

"Congratulations." I tried to shake his hand but he pulled it away.

"Not yet," my father cautioned. "I want you to read the story. Invite

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me and Margaret over on Thursday," he gently bullied, and then instructed, "After the main course we'll have small talk and you'll go into your study and read my story." When father snapped his fingers, I saw him years ago moving back and forth in his makeshift office, like a prisoner suddenly getting an idea and hurling himself across the room and fiercely dialing the phone number of some underling. And I resented his game plan this afternoon.

He said, "And we'll discuss the manuscript, over coffee and the chocolate mousse cake I'll bring from Dumas."

We shook hands on it.

Laura said cautiously, "Just be kind. Tell him writing the story is a romantic gesture."

"He often told Charles and me never to bullshit a bullshitter."

"I think he'd accept praise from you."

"And I think he may be daring me not to praise his fluff."

Before storming out of the living room, Laura asked, "Why are you so furious, he wrote a story?"

Until Thursday I was in rotten spirits. I taught my classes indifferently and dismissed them early. I was impatient and short-tempered at home. I suddenly found my sons far too noisy. I resented Laura always taking the old man's side, She had real sympathy for the primitive power broker of my childhood. I slept poorly. I wrote a letter and sent a check to Charles but I had no intention of flying out to Denver to be with him. And I wondered how different was I from my father, unwilling to ever be compassionate.

On Thursday evening he arrived punctually, bearing a bouquet of roses for Laura and baseball gloves for the boys, who dashed around the apartment spearing imaginary line drives. My stepmother, Margaret, sat down on the couch and began smoking. Father had once told me sadly that cigarettes were her only vice.

Father, in an expensive light-blue silk suit, exuded self-confidence. This meeting was a done deal. There was predictable aimless conversation and drinks refilled, while Margaret, eyes half-shut, grimly smoked. Pollution was her sole contribution to any evening.

The game plan was to be appetizers, followed by prime roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Then intermission, until I returned with gaudy news about father's first attempt at fiction. I felt like an aged toddler, anxious to make awful mischief and able to contribute only negative news and sounds. Not even brave father (Laura's phrase) would be spared for what he dared to write. I felt distant from everyone in the living room. Tom

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and Gregg had drifted to their rooms and homework and whispering and I thought of Charles and me in times of adolescent despair. Laura tailed my father like a wise nurse anticipating a great man's fall. Father, sipping countless white wine spritzers, was oblivious to problems. He was accustomed to applause and success, but I owed him plenty for the poem I'd written years ago lamenting the morning Charles was first locked up.

Father, ever impatient, roared, "I certainly anticipate better news from you about my story than what I just learned about Charles."

"I don't understand. What's happened?"

"Charles tried to kill himself last night. But of course he failed!"

"You're disappointed?"

"Facts are always simple. Your brother never stops looking for the easy way out."

"Is he okay?"

"Aside from a bruised throat, Charles is the same," father said wearily.

"You spoke to him?" I asked, still unsettled to hear father even say Charles's name after a dozen years of willful silence.

"I did not," he said, churlishly adding, "I did talk to his lawyer, whose fee I understand you paid."

"Why didn't you call me last night?"

"I don't know. And believe it or not, professor, I'm glad Charles didn't succeed."

"Of course you are," Laura interrupted.

Father did not bow out gracefully; it was not his lusty style.

He added, "None of us should be surprised by any of Charles's many failures."

Furious, I left the room to make sure the boys were getting ready for bed. Laura and Margaret were serving the appetizers when I strode away.

When I returned, Laura had put aside a platter of paté and Saga cheese on flat bread. Father had been eating nonstop. His suit was unwrinkled. I always considered him of average height, but occasionally I correctly perceived how tiny and fragile he could appear to the innocent eye.

We were beckoned to the dining room by Laura and served excellent roast beef. I was not going to say anything more to my father until I read his damn story. "The salad is tasty," my father praised too loudly. I ate very little. Laura couldn't take her eyes off me.

As Laura and Margaret took the dishes away, father removed the manuscript delicately from his inside pocket and offered it to me. It was a graceful gesture, the second time in four days I'd seen him almost courtly.

Father tried not to look nervous. He certainly seemed thoughtful.

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That's his business look, I thought, the overconfident ambience he loves to create, as an edge. Without saying a word, I turned my back and walked into the master bedroom and shut the door. I read my father's story standing up.

It was in the first person. The narrator in the first three pages was a boy of ten, and in the last three pages the narrator was now sixty years older. The voice in both segments was perfectly believable. The piece was intelligent, carefully blocked out, ironic and well done. I didn't dare sit down; I read it again.

The young boy was a mischievous bully determined to challenge a society that needs to be pushed around. "They expect it," the boy decides, as he lies at will, cheats on tests and charms his victims.

The narrator becomes a valued advisor to the President. He tells how he is honored each year for his intricate skills at lying and deception. He may even have once prevented a war.

He claims, "I am the natural result of the American Dream."

And he concludes, "How can someone like me ever be chastised or jailed or not be absolutely necessary?"

Every word had a weight and meaning. There was passion in the writing. It owed a lot to Hemingway and Sherwood Anderson. I read it a third time and was still impressed.

It's for Charles, too, I thought angrily, but he'll never see it.

They all turned to face me when I came back. Margaret was now loudly chewing gum. Laura rocked back and forth on the couch. Father was flushed and attempting to judge my decision. He seemed uneasy and I was glad.

"It's good, it's very good. I was surprised."

Laura clapped her hands softly.

"But you're not happy," father said grimly.

"It's not your story that's making me unhappy."

"But you have a problem, I can tell, damn it! What's wrong with it?"

"I just said it's first-rate."

"Should it be longer?"

"You could tell more. There could be a few more detailed scenes."

"Our teacher said if the voice is good, you believe it all."

"I do believe."

"Then what do you want?"

"Dialogue, too, more dialogue."

Father stamped his feet on the carpet. He was very frustrated.

"It's probably publishable in a literary magazine," I said.

"Which one?"

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"I don't read them. But I'm sure it's in the ballpark. Ask your teacher."

"I told you the class is over. The class is dead."

"That's a little dramatic," I smiled thinly.

My father whispered, "The teacher said it was the best story in class."

"I'm sure that's true."

"It was hard as hell. I'm an old man. Writing got me very tired. Let's have dessert and call it a day."

"Night," I corrected.

He didn't smile. Neither did anyone else.

After dessert, father yanked Margaret away. Both barely muttered good night. Father kissed Laura and nodded curtly to me. I strolled into the center of the living room and began cleaning up the cake crumbs.

Laura said coldly, "That was awful; you were so stern and unyielding." She scowled.

"I treated him as I would any promising student."

"He's your father!"

"I'm his son. Much that I am is owed all to him."

"No," she said, "you were annoyed and a little jealous. You wanted to punish him, but he had skills you never imagined."

"What do you want?" I asked.

She pleaded, "Go after him. He was shaking."

"You're wrong," I said.

But I left the apartment, and once in the deserted lobby, swung open the entrance door and ran outside.

They had only gotten as far as the next block. Father was leaning against a parked Honda. His head was thrust up toward the pale sky. He was gasping for breath. Margaret was crying.

Both relaxed when they spotted me. Slowly, my father straightened up. He began breathing deeply and seemed okay. Margaret blew her nose several times, searched in her purse for a cigarette. Instead she came up with a piece of gum, but she seemed satisfied.

My father confessed nervously, "Too much wine, and meat. And then that killer cake. I felt queasy, wasn't my heart. Relax!"

He clearly wanted to ignore any other questions of health.

"I must apologize. I was pompous and tried to be the neutral reader. That wasn't fair."

"Forget it."

"You wrote a wonderful story, took chances with the narrative, and it held up."

"Look, I admit I could do better."

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Now I leaned against the car.

"Don't worry," my father said forlornly, "I won't write anymore."

He touched my hand. I gripped his hand firmly. We both stared at each other in surprise. Margaret chewed her gum patiently.

"What grade would you give me, professor?"

"A."

"Not B+."

"No."

"What about A- ?"

"A."

"Have I talent?"

"Oh, yes."

"*This* time I have talent, right."

I nodded.

"You were warning me, you gotta do it again and again to be a real writer."

"I'm not sure what I – "

He interrupted impatiently, "You were complimenting me. You just weren't handing me any prizes. You were taking me seriously. I appreciate that."

"I overdid it."

"You're probably a great teacher."

"I used to be. Now, I'm not sure."

"No, you're a pro, I see that."

Father was restless. His suit remained firmly pressed. His gray eyes were weary but clear. He didn't even try to smile.

"It's late. C'mon, honey, I have a power breakfast at eight."

"Let me walk you home."

"No, don't be silly."

"Call a cab."

"It's only five blocks. Go home and teach philosophy," he ordered good-naturedly.

Father almost reached out to me again, but decided against it. Margaret walked slowly behind him. I followed them. Abruptly, my father stopped and permitted me to catch up.

"Here," he said peevishly, and, treating me as if I were a panhandler, offered instead of loose change, six folded pages; then, grabbing his wife firmly, he waltzed home.

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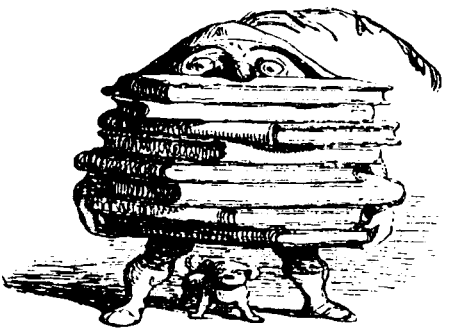
Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.
Francis Bacon

Voracious Reader?

Satisfy Your Appetite For Books...
...And For Giving.



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POEMS

MIROSLAV HOLUB

The Journey

In the horizontal plane
cities pass
like sensors for signals
from elsewhere.

Less and less I understand
precisely why I'm here and whether
it's the right me.

Each train station and bus terminal
has photographs of missing children:

Christopher Milton Dansky
Abducted by unknown individual
DOB 3/30/87
Eyes: brown
Height: 2'6"
Weight: 30 lbs.
Hair: Black
Last seen: 5/18/89

Jennifer Chia
. . . by unknown . . . 1/22/83
. . . brown . . . 3'6". . . 60 . . . black
. . . last 10/18/89

They still smile from their photographs
at all the terminals,

although they know by now precisely
why they are not right here,
not their right selves, and

the Queen of the Undead
hangs on their lips
like a weasel

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and a trickle of blood runs down
their chins to patter
gently, drop by drop,
on a blue and white toy drum
bought at a street fair. And in a soft
and cosmic darkness
mama is teaching fledgling vampires
how to fly.

On a bench, under the photographs,
a mildly crazy codger
sings in a raspy voice
like a king from Legoland.

Translated from the Czech by David Young and the author

The Autumn Orchard

Some pawky,
black apple
executed on a naked twig.

Two pigeons
on a rundown fence
tearing white feathers from themselves
because there's nothing else
worth sorting.

Cinderella has smeared herself
with ashes, trying
to discourage
her father's incest.

Through an open window
a bunch of poets
are cursing violently.

Although, in fact, everything's
just they way they like it.

Translated from the Czech by Dána Habóva and David Young

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JOHN PECK

Weather over the Lake

Bowl lifting roof and path into one round,
road and roof brimming that bowl with living, dying:
morning's wide breath relinks patterns on water.

Lights in the factory at sun-up, hull lashed to hull at midday.
From strictest quantum simmer and along foamy rock
probers lean out, finding the next ford in the river.

A shuttering of light from behind, gray going grape blue.
Though I went on working, the hair on my neck frayed
like cable in the museum, flax from the Stone Age.

The creamy paint I laid on that man's house, which tarp
kept off his cute little Max Ernst bronze, had been mixed
to resist dawn shadows, noon shimmers, and now this.

Black sheering up while the powerful say, *We lack power*,
roof-blow from a black root blooming icily, flashing.
But even Alexander poured the one full helmet into dust –

for a shout can break forth in which any cry wakes
to limits, and the drums be uncased in acknowledgment.
Though it reach our tongues, it will be spilled, every drop.

JANE KENYON

Sleepers in Jaipur

A mango moon climbs the dark
blue sky. In the gutters of a market
a white, untethered cow browses
the day's leavings – wilted greens,
banana peels, spilt rice,
a broken basket.

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C. H. SISSON

Eppur Si Muove

1.
People I have not known enter my head,
Clear a room for themselves, and sit down,
Knowing that I shall welcome them, and the living
Are not likely to intrude while they are there.
Why so? Is this then a cavern for the dead?
Has it become so because under the frown
Of death there is no hope or forgiving,
Or in the hope that all there is fair?

The kingdom of the dead is no farther
Away than the centre of my mind.
It is there that the vanished speak, some word they said
Lights up or darkens my own vacancy.
It matters little enough what ghosts are there,
There is always some pain or folly to find:
The folly is mine and not that of the dead,
Who nod together, and in their nodding agree.

2.
I who no longer circulate
Where people think they think, or do,
Know there was never yet debate
Where either *pro* or *con* was true.
What statement ever was? What act
Rested on more than movement?
And, on the simple bread of fact,
Is butter an improvement?

3.
We who seem to others not what we are
But what they think we are: we the old,
Plausible travellers who have come from far,
Remember others of whom strange tales were told.

So generations find no secrets out,
The traveller came from nowhere after all:
The bold advance of thought became a rout.
It is some time since Adam had his fall.

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The sleepers, oh, so many sleepers . . .
They lie on rush mats in their hot
stick hut. The man and woman
want to love wildly, noisily.
Instead, they are quiet and efficient
in the dark. Bangles ring
as his mother stirs in her sleep.

Who can say what will come of
the quickening and slowing
of their breaths on each others'
necks, of their deep shudders?
Another sleeper, a gift of God,
ribs and shoulders to be clothed
in flesh . . .

In the dusty garden the water
she carried from the well in a jug
balanced on her black hair
stares back at the moon
from its cool terra-cotta urn.

DEBORA GREGER

Rilke in the Middle Ages

> *In that age the body, which was cultivated like a piece of land, tended carefully like a harvest, and which one owned as one owns a valuable property, was the thing looked upon. . . .*
> –Rainer Maria Rilke

He felt too much, as usual.
The woman woven into the tapestry
unwrapped a necklace, lifting it
on its cloth, no sacrament,

to show her worth as wife to the beholder.
The family lion held a tent flap open,
as did the unicorn she'd tamed
to prove she was still virginal.

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Within, dark threads tangled with dark,
sweet the tortures of intimacy.
What did she have to hide?
A lady of title and some wealth,

one who could loan a castle, older –
as always in such company
he was ready to kiss the ground
she floated just above,

the suddenly close air she seemed to breathe,
kiss even her ladyship, this one nothing
if not safe for the artist intent
on spinning free of entanglements.

Cut off by a sea the shade of flame,
not the salt blue of tears well drowned,
she stood, a centuries-older woman
fading like any other, still tied

to her island knot by rotting knot.
Beyond the one hardwood, the prickly bush,
a tree of needles and a blood orange,
red-stained sky joined seamlessly to sea.

Keeping a distance close enough
to pass for love, her falcon hunted a heron
through humdrum the young Rilke was convinced
only the faithful ever professed to know,

one lady-in-waiting, one lapdog, one desire.

RAFAEL CAMPO

Camino Real

I speak by cutting ruts in air. The dust –
Imagine that it's gold, the Spaniards did –
Is caking in my throat. And when I sing,
Pretend the hawks aren't vanishing, pretend

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The fallen fortresses the chaparral
Forgets defend a way of life again.
I speak as if I knew this road. I speak
The Spanish that I never really learned;

The mission walls, spit out like broken teeth
Along the desert roads, are punishments
I can't recall, but vaguely recognize.
The Spanish that I never knew at all,

My heritage and punishment, the walls
At once too sharp and weak to lean upon,
The screeching of the hawks – with these, like them
I want to cut a road, an artery

Directly to the place I know. Pretend
You know it too, imagine gold is words,
Pure gold is in our chalices and throats,
And watch the mission priest tame hawks for pets.

REI TERADA

Piero di Cosimo

after Panofsky

People of no importance still lay curled on the ground
  asleep. The boy encamped on someone's cloak
still cupped his elbows, cold from earth, in his unlined palms,
  not knowing exactly how long the others had worked:
the fire–blower, and the horseshoe–forger, he
  with the thinker's brow, the blacksmith's arms and chest,
and the thin, stiff leg which made him the gods' laughingstock,
  now making a second horseshoe which a youth
who leaned from his calm civilized horse was anxious to see.
  The time had not yet come for level planks,
but that the time was coming anyone could feel:
  the builders had framed their second hut that night,
and the baby was learning how to say the word "family";
  hadn't they got from furs to suede to wool?
The old man crouched boosting the fire was no one's fool.
  He was Aeolus, shepherd of winds, and he knew
progress was just collective weariness. The plums
  were sour and the ants malarial,

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and everybody couldn't help but know the woods
still spawned not only such as the tiny camel
emerging from behind a rock with its packsaddle and
the giraffe peering at him hermetically,
but boars with women's faces and other half-human mishaps
who had driven them, with the benigner animals, here.
An ostrich clopped the gravel path, as though it called
the recent husband's name who rubbed his heel,
himself, his wife and child already duplicate
behind him, in a more developed home.
This scene between Lipari and the Sicilian coast
began to have the air of a scene recalled
in only the most eccentric of memories, as if
the sunrise hoped to be forgotten. Though
the life they built erased them, erases us, right now
we'd do the same, we'd make the world of making.

GOTTFRIED BENN

Quaternary

I
The worlds are drunk and drinking
to create new room,
and the last Quaternaries are sinking
the Ptolemaic dream.
Decline, holocausts, failures
in toxic spheres, cold,
still a few Stygian souls
solitary, high and old.

II
Come – let them rise and sink
the cycles are breaking out,
violin, age-old Sphinx,
and from Babylon a gate,
Jazz from the Rio del Grande,
Swing and a prayer,
by sinking fires, from the border,
where in ash all things disappear.

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I slit the gorge of the mutton
and filled the fosse with blood,
the shadows came, met one
another here – I listened hard –
each one drank and recounted
tales of swords and decaying,
the steer- and swan-mounted
women cried in their train.

Quaternary cycles – scenes,
but they leave you unaware,
is the last thing now the tears
or is it desire –
or refracting a few colors
if both are a rainbow,
mirrored or deceived –
you know, you don't know.

Colossal brains are bending
over their then and when,
they watch the thread unwinding
that the ancient spider spins,
with snuffling in every distance
on everything that fails,
breeding their own resistance
the world observing itself.

One of God's dreams
looked for a while at itself,
playfully, and in derision
the old Spinnerman looks too,
then he gathers asphodels
and wanders along the Styx –
leave suffering for the last ones
leave them stories to tell
All Souls' Evening –
"Fini du tout."

Translated from the German by Teresa Iverson

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MARTHA HOLLANDER

Requiem

A view of the late afternoon
city in midwinter reveals
golden slabs of the sun painted
on the hither sides of houses.
Their darkened windows throb against
the din of the light, while
the notes on the page answer black.
The open score offers a requiem
in the French manner: austere and hushed.
Under the celestial whispers
of the telephone, your voice was
thinned by painkillers, the call
costing the barest flicker of breath.
With the same bewildered softness,
the boy sopranos on my recording
scale each steep dissonance,
colder than clouds. Does it feel
like floating over the shadowed street,
easing toward a summit? Is it
higher than anyone could sing?
On the top floor of this building
shot through with the angled sun,
I go over the music again.
Closed in the prison of sleep
at the bright, attenuated
edge of twilight, *lux perpetua,*
you start rehearsing for death.

SOPHIE CABOT BLACK

Overdose

All night I hold your driven body tight
Against some quantity of quaalude. A diner's
Bad sign slides through our window to a wrist,
To the essential curve of a stocking,

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My twisted arms as I study your mouth
For breath. The trumped-up light lands
And flares on what feels like instinct, lover,
Sister. I work significance
Into our profiles, in worrying down the night,
The ambulance not for us
While in your teeth a broken music winds
Its sad story to keep itself alive.
Into the ear a radio sends
Analog until it only spills
One message: forgive each debt
And the rest will follow. My numb arms
Weave in with yours and wasted
Time hammers on the wall behind your head
As I guard this story, this tongue
I keep you from swallowing, thick with pulse.
The broken and insolvent music goes
Round and round, halo of a headlight runs
Through trembling fingers. I have conceived
Of deeper alibis than even this.
I assemble a life giving myself
Nothing but particulars to end with.

DAVID LEHMAN

The Escape Artist

A dark green room: the experiment fails,
And the leaves change color before their time.
He felt, though he had not committed a crime,
Like a gangster disguised in a top hat and tails,
Entering the lady's East Village apartment
To seduce her. If he should arrive out of breath,
It's because he knows that Eros equals death,
Though that's not what the church fathers meant.

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"In this green planet swirling in the primal night,
I met my enemy and embraced him." Translation:
"Women desire men as much as men desire women."
Furthermore, her biological clock was going
Tick tock, confusing everyone. It wasn't snowing.
He didn't betray her. She didn't say when.
"I'm leaving you," she said, in a fit of exultation,
The day he stopped smoking. He still needed a light.

She called him a romantic fool, but she didn't mean
To make him feel bad. She just wanted to love him
With the pure love that linked the murderer and the whore
In the attic, where the lights had grown dim.
Yet the darkness was green, however drab the scene
Where danger took the stranger, and the heroine
In his arms was someone he hadn't met before
And didn't expect to meet again

In the seedy familiar hotel room with the bullets flying
All around them. Yes, and they weren't dying,
And the imaginary spies of childhood were still spying
On them, the sinful and tormented ones,
Hungry for ordinary corrupt human love, and bound
To turn up wherever a lively crisis could be found:
A lost breed, the sort of chap who knew all about guns,
Having used them for Russian Roulette, and won.

(In memoriam Graham Greene, 1904-1991)

CLAIRE NICOLAS WHITE

Lost Daughter

Ten years later I still haunt
High School corridors
in search of girls with blazing hair
coiffed like lionesses
who suddenly burst into song
o mio dolce ardor
their voices frail as reeds
  but sweet
pigeon-toed half women
that promise ripeness.

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In the subway station where all is dark
the man singing "We play the circle game"
accompanies himself on the guitar.
He has few teeth in middle age.
The song was hers some fifteen years ago.
This might be she if allowed
to go round and round.
Thank God she went so young and innocent
with all her teeth, No lover ditched her
and made her weep. Only the mortician
painted her nails, the creep.
That death was rape enough
intruding on the perfect body.
I throw the man a dollar
well worth the tune
she might be singing now.

STEPHEN ACKERMAN

Insomnia Asylum

The Mojo gangs roamed the beer factories.
Surly, mean, mysteriously solemn,
Like Renoir's *The Southerner,*
Innocently solemn, like two young boys
Becoming blood brothers.
In the insomnia asylum, daft rhetoric,
Daft conduct shaped divorce, swept me
Off the deck of a dream of sexual pleasure,
The one she imagined for herself
With you and confided in you
And practiced with you.
The Mojo gangs roamed the beer factories.
They roamed among the vats of malt. Pleasure
Promised, deferred, denied, pleasure
Had. Dear Dad, good-bye. "Like
A summer with a thousand Julys."
I saw the gangs, heard the beer hall songs.
The tyranny of the beer hall
Songs soaked your love,

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Surly, mean, mysteriously solemn,
Exuberant, they raised their glasses,
Sang venomous, sang sad.
Two women live here, one man
And myself. The libido hymn, the anthem
Of lamentation – Dad's infidelity
Is the melody. The Mojo gangs
Roamed the beer factories,
And the night blossomed like an avalanche,
Burying you under the weight of Venus,
Under a dome of visible stars.

A. F. MORITZ

Founders

Beautiful in its distance
the day burning down and flight of stars,
quiet in your eyes, disaster so far away
it is still forgotten music, ancient peace.

Incomparable, this human world: the vast
plain of black roofs,
light and music at the quiet crossing where five streets join.
Full of joyous prophecy is the flight of heraldic sparrows
in shifting rivers, childish, self-willed
flocks unravelling among elms at dusk. Women decay,
and houses stand open, orange light
streams from the torn eyes and mouths. Others are dark
as though ruined, abandoned last century
or this afternoon: in the distant day of the founders.

Hidden in a moist culvert with booming frogs,
tracks gleam bronze in the low sun and cattails
flow with white molten flax congealing.
Dusky slag. Purple thistle. Empty flowering fields,
guardian lights and chain-link fence. Decades, rust
made lace of black factory hangars on the river flats
and the red west burns through: pattern and quiet glory,
steel decomposing, new fire.

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In the park a boy and girl stopped under oaks
and revolved the names: of the city, its streets, this park,
the long dead owners' names, their races
sunk in quiet shadow, fireflies and empty streets,
this black paving or ground.

Shouts of children, dwarfed
in the vast pleasure of coming night.
Arc, fall, thud, splash of balls and swimmers' bodies.
Evening, the eyes, the coolness of young skin
shining near water: such evening was your temple,
temple of pure distance, stones crumbled to their vacant form.
It was you glimmering, you the statue there.
Men in troops passed in through high burning metal doors,
hammers the strength of a thousand could never lift
fell in order, they felt that thumping in the ground
in their frames, a surer heart.

And here you were faintly smiling, not forgotten,
impassive, choked with prayers, worn by hands.
It was you who gave yourself up, your brow painted
with stars and massifs of cloud, your dance and voice
of frog and snake, cricket and locust, your age
more ancient, younger than the naked August night.

Without a cry you gave yourself up, with your memories
of a people from far away, strange minds that built this place:
some were stunned at the fading, the mercy,
the strengthlessness of your memories.
The whole injustice of the earth – isn't it here? –
the whole failure of the blessing, in this wooden calm
of faces, walls, obscure
spaces, passion, peace. Too happy
for oracles, a father's or a mother's voice
mixed with gray slime and mist where childhood's stream
bleeds from the ground, you still were blessed with peace
by the one unknown.

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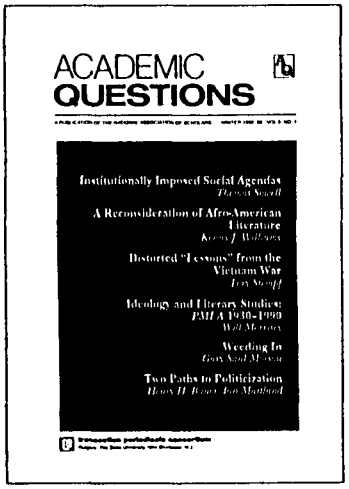

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TRANSACTION

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PETER SHAW

The Genteel Fate of *Huckleberry Finn*

Upon its publication in 1885, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was banned from public libraries, and Huck Finn's bad language and behavior were subjected to high-minded censure. One hundred years later, in a similarly Victorian manner, Huck's wavering attitude toward race and slavery were deplored, and once again the book disappeared from public libraries. While today no one would deny that Mark Twain's presentation of the slave, Jim, is disturbing and embarrassing, and while the values that later critics of the book wished to instill are superior to the shallow moralism of the 1880s, these later critics, no less than their predecessors, have violated a work's literary integrity by demanding that it conform to a particular morality. Their air of offended virtue in response to racism in *Huckleberry Finn* has returned academics of the 1980s – ordinarily priding themselves on being iconoclastic if not outrageous in their moral attitudes – to the spirit of the genteel tradition.

The genteel sensibility dominating nineteenth-century American literary taste called for socially acceptable attitudes expressed with strict propriety of language. Huck's asocial attitudes and colloquial language, both of which manifestly violated genteel standards, led straight to the Concord Public Library's banning of the book in which he appeared. Yet the genteel tradition was dead by the turn of the century, and both Huck's table manners and Mark Twain's literary manners ceased to seem outrageous. Instead, they began to be appreciated as triumphs of literary realism.

Still later, *Huckleberry Finn* was elevated to the status of a work deserving advanced literary discussion. In introductions to paperback editions in 1949, T. S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling treated it as both symbolic and mythic. In the course of the 1950s other critics, having been shown how contemporary critical terminology could be applied, proceeded to flesh out the accounts by Eliot and Trilling. Huck Finn's escape from the stifling life of his small Missouri town was viewed as a journey toward an idealized brotherhood with the escaped slave, Jim. The raft on which the two of them floated away was more than a raft, and the river whose current swept them along was more than a river. Trilling spoke of the river's "noble grandeur in contrast with the pettiness of men," and he suggested that the river took on the attributes of a god, which "to men of moral

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imagination, appears to embody a great moral idea." That idea obviously included a condemnation of slavery – so obviously that the condemnation could go virtually without saying. Eliot put it that by allowing the reader "to make his own moral reflections," *Huckleberry Finn* delivers "a far more convincing indictment of slavery than the sensationalist propaganda of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Also in the 1950s, though, genteelism – minus its concern for propriety of language – returned to American criticism as an approved attitude toward racism, and Mark Twain's novel again fell into disgrace with literary critics. Leo Marx, for example, was not satisfied with the reader's own moral reflections. In 1953, in his essay "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and *Huckleberry Finn*," Marx chided both critics for their complacency toward Mark Twain's "glaring lapse of moral imagination" in the book's final adventure, where slavery is treated lightly. For years, this adventure has been criticized as tediously long, and both Trilling and Eliot conceded its defects. But they argued that the formal aptness of the book's return to the atmosphere of its opening section rescued matters sufficiently to sustain the claim that on the whole *Huckleberry Finn* deserves to be regarded as a first-rate work of the literary imagination.

The opening section, it will be recalled, features the "boys' adventure book"-like misbehavior of Huck and his friend Tom Sawyer. Huck, the nondescript son of the town drunk, has agreed to live with a respectable widow, go to school, and learn manners in order to get in on Tom's latest game: forming a gang of pretend robbers. Huck's father, though, abducts him and returns him to his slothful, irresponsible existence. When Pap Finn gets so crazily violent with drink that he threatens Huck's life, the boy runs away to nearby Jackson's Island. There he stumbles across Jim, a recently runaway slave well known to Tom and himself. Huck and Jim find a driftwood raft and set off down the Mississippi.

The next to the last of their adventures is the takeover of the raft by the two confidence men who call themselves the Duke and the Dauphin. When these scalawags run out of luck and money, one of them sells Jim back into slavery. Again Huck and Jim run away, but this time they are separated, and Huck ends up at a farm coincidentally owned by Tom's Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas. The gullible couple takes Huck for Tom, whom they have never seen and who is momentarily expected to arrive for a visit. Huck as usual plays along, letting them believe he is Tom. When Tom himself arrives, after being alerted by Huck he pretends to be his own brother, Sid. The boys soon locate Jim, who is being held locked up on this very farm, slated once again for a return to slavery.

Tom now conducts another of his make-believe adventures, an elaborate and unnecessarily involved plot to free Jim, even though a few minutes' work at night could easily do the job. In fact, Tom knows, as every-

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one else at the farm does not, that Jim has recently been set free – something Tom reveals only at the end. It is Huck's participation in Tom's doubly unnecessary rescue shenanigans that has always disturbed critics and has threatened the book's stature as a classic. In the course of his adventures Huck had learned that contrary to the South's slaveholding ideology, Jim is fully a human being. But now Huck's hard-earned appreciation of Jim's humanity is no longer evident.

The aesthetic shortcomings of all the coincidences and late revelations, and the diminution in stature of the characters, troubled Leo Marx less than the neglect of what he considered "the theme at the novel's center." This was the "quest for freedom" from slavery for Jim and all others of his race and condition. According to Marx, this is the theme actually being developed through Huck's gradually dawning appreciation of Jim's humanity. But Mark Twain suffered a "failure of nerve," charges Marx; he let Huck regress to his initial, stereotyped view of Jim (and at the same time returned Jim to his initial, equally stereotyped behavior). As for Eliot and Trilling, they were guilty of taking the theme of freedom from slavery altogether too "lightly" by discussing the shortcomings of the last adventure in aesthetic rather than moral terms.

In order to make his case against *Huckleberry Finn*'s treatment of race, Marx had to challenge Eliot and Trilling's mythic interpretations. He began by labeling Eliot's account of the river "extravagant." The book's critique of slavery should be located not there, he argued, but in an action: Jim's run to freedom with the aid of Huck. Marx himself made clear the function of his shift in emphasis from the realm of the mythic to specific actions. His was an attempt, he wrote, to restore some of the social consciousness of the 1930s-style, leftist criticism against which Eliot and Trilling seemed to him to be overreacting. From a leftist point of view, Huck and Jim can be seen as rebels whose actions criticize and whose spirits reject society as it is.

Somewhat contradictorily, though, Marx offered a second account of the book's theme, this time implying that the social message was not actually located in the actions of the characters. In this account, the raft is "the symbolic locus of the novel's central affirmations" – a formulation that in its emphasis on symbol rather than any explicit action could have been made by either Eliot or Trilling. (Marx did not explain why it should be critically correct to assign a broader meaning to the raft but critically "extravagant" to assign broader meanings to the river.) Marx identified the raft's meaning specifically with Huck's often-cited remark that "what you want, above all things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others." Instead of taking this in the usual way as an expression of genial unconcern with principles,

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Marx treated it as a "human credo" that "obliquely aims a devastating criticism at the existing social order."

The criticism presumed to be implied in Huck's words supposedly had to do with slavery. That is, the idea of people feeling "right and kind" toward one another evokes other people enslaving one another. For Marx, Huck's credo marked a stage in growth toward his decision at the end of the book to light out for the "Territory," supposedly because he can no longer bear the slave-holding society of the American South. On the way to the book's ending, Huck's famous decision to go to hell rather than turn in Jim is taken to be "the climactic moment in the ripening of his self-knowledge"; at the very end, Huck is not escaping petty harassments but portentously traveling "west ahead of the inescapable advance of civilization" (and therefore slavery). Yet Marx ultimately expressed disappointment with his own symbolic raft. That conveyance, he wrote, "provides an uncertain and indeed precarious mode of traveling toward freedom," instead of offering an alternative, positive social vision – as he believed a symbol in a book should do.

Following Marx, critics of *Huckleberry Finn* would go on to voice similar disappointments for the next forty years. Gradually at first but unmistakably by the end of the 1960s, Marx's updated, 1930s-style conception of the book as a social document came to dominate criticism. The essential subject was confidently taken to be slavery and freedom. And the only question to be answered was how well Mark Twain stuck to this subject. The mythic and symbolic interpretation of literature exemplified by Eliot and Trilling was everywhere set aside (though it sometimes crept back in, as with Leo Marx's raft). Nor was the shift to the social approach deterred when its assumptions were thrown seriously into question in 1962 by one of the leading scholars of Mark Twain and of American literature.

Henry Nash Smith challenged placing slavery at the very thematic and symbolic center of *Huckleberry Finn*. Doing so, he wrote,

> presupposes first, that the question of slavery as an actual institution in the Old South is central to the entire novel, and second, that Huck has matured in the course of the narrative so that his last decision has a depth not characteristic of his attitudes and actions at the beginning. Huck's maturity, according to this view, now enables him to perceive that slavery is evil.

Neither of these suppositions, Smith went on to show, can stand up to critical scrutiny. Jim's escape from slavery constitutes the overt action of *Huckleberry Finn* but not, as Leo Marx had it, "the theme at the novel's

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center." And Huck does not grow "in stature throughout the journey." For not even in his famous go-to-hell decision, in which he chooses damnation over betrayal of Jim, does Huck show himself "capable of arriving at the abstract proposition, 'Slavery is wrong'." Instead, Smith wrote, "what he is trying to escape from is not a society corrupted by slavery, but the same petty harassments he had fled from at the end of *Tom Sawyer*."

In 1977, Kenneth Lynn called attention to the phenomenon of Henry Nash Smith's critique having been all but universally ignored – and ignored without so much as acknowledgment that there were grounds for disagreement on both the issue of the centrality of slavery and of the depth of Huck's philosophical understanding. Lynn sided with Smith and added his own objections to interpreting Huck's decision to "light out" as a social critique. Lynn then attempted to account for why critics held to Leo Marx's view. Critics of the 1950s, Lynn observed, had wanted among other things "to believe that Huck was renouncing his membership in a society that condoned slavery because they themselves did not wish to live in a segregationist America." An admirable social impulse had distorted critical judgment by placing an inordinate emphasis on slavery.

This is not to say that society goes unscathed in *Huckleberry Finn*. Huck the renegade is most certainly running from its constrictions. But Leo Marx did not include among these the attempts by Aunt Polly and other benefactors to make Huck a proper member of society by getting him to keep regular hours and wash behind his ears (the stuff of the book's comedy at the beginning and again at the end). Instead, Marx saw Huck's ordeal to be his exposure to Aunt Polly's and others' hypocrisy about slavery. Marx's *Huckleberry Finn* was a work neither comic nor meliorist, but rather so steeped in outrage at slavery that its fussy Aunt Polly deserved to be called "the Enemy." And with "their shabby morality," Tom's sweet, bumbling Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally Phelps were "reminiscent of those solid German citizens we have heard about in our time who tried to maintain a similarly *gemütlich* way of life within virtual earshot of Buchenwald."

Marx's expression of outrage, though it came in 1953, anticipated the tonality of criticism in the sixties. By invoking the historical fact that all Southerners lived within a slave system, it is possible to stigmatize every single character in *Huckleberry Finn*. Accordingly, the overtly vicious characters – Pap Finn, the murderous Grangerfords, and the duplicitous Duke and Dauphin – came to be treated by white critics as hardly distinguishable from the good characters. As for the good characters, any one of them could come under equal critical disapproval. Tom, for example, came to be seen not as foolishly romantic in his charade of freeing the al-

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ready free Jim, but positively villainous. Chadwick Hansen typified the prevailing climate of critical disdain for virtually every character in *Huckleberry Finn* when he wrote in 1963:

> If the reader has learned anything from this novel he has learned that the consciences even of the decent people have been depraved by their moral blindness to the evil of slavery.

In the 1980s, the kindly Judge Thatcher was condemned. Eventually, logically enough, so was Huckleberry Finn himself, on account of his cooperating with Tom to humiliate Jim in their last adventure. Not even Huck's moral high point was excluded from the indictment. "His decision to 'go to hell' to free Jim," wrote one critic, "is the last shudder of a psyche hopelessly divided against itself and poised for a fall into Tom Sawyer." That Mark Twain had failed to sustain the antislavery vision of his novel seemed incontrovertible to post-sixties critics. One of them, John Seelye, published a well-received rewrite of the entire book titled *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, in which he brought the plot into line with contemporary thinking about race. Among other changes, Aunt Sally's mild husband, Silas Phelps, was transformed into a vicious hunter of escaped slaves.

Leo Marx and antislavery theorists after him were necessarily at some pains to explain why it was that Mark Twain himself had failed to treat his characters and plot the way they themselves would have. Regarding the characters, Leo Marx explained that Mark Twain "understood people like the Phelpses, but nevertheless he was forced to rely upon them to provide his happy ending." In other words, Mark Twain must have agreed with twentieth-century critics that all white Southerners of the antebellum period were monsters, and only the exigencies of his plot or his failure of nerve kept him from depicting them as such. In fact, characters like Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally Phelps were needed for more than the happy ending. Harold Kaplan, writing in 1972, pointed out that the ordinary folk in the book "cannot be finally overturned, because in a sense they are the only possible authorities; they are, in effect, the 'people'." If everyone is evil, Kaplan was saying, then there can never be a way out of social crimes like slavery. This is why, contrary to most critics' wishes, the book depicts what Kenneth Lynn described as "fundamentally decent people." (Thinking back on the effects slavery had on his own parents and neighbors, Mark Twain expressed an opinion in keeping with this characterization. "I think it [slavery] stupefied everyone's humanities as regarded the slave," he wrote, "but stopped there.")

As for the kindly, selfless Uncle Silas, Mark Twain's portrait of him

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veers, if anything, toward the sentimental. Far from representing universal evil, he is held up as a good-hearted type of the sort that, we are told, could be found throughout the South during slavery days. No wonder that Michael Egan, a Marxist who unreservedly hates the book's ordinary bourgeois characters on principle, had no difficulty in recognizing that they are cast in a favorable light. He concluded with disgust that they are "the real heroes of *Huckleberry Finn*." Writing from a different point of view, Alfred J. Levy, one of the rare critics who still argues for the essential goodness of the ordinary characters, has written that Mark Twain "refuses the gambit of making all Southerners knaves or fools because they accepted slavery. Had he done so the book would have become strident propaganda."

As with Mark Twain's failure to depict his characters as the critics see them, so with his failure to arrange the plot as they see fit. Here, surprisingly enough, Leo Marx invoked George Santayana's critique of the late nineteenth-century "genteel tradition." In keeping with that tradition's spirit of conventionality, and in fear of hazarding his reputation as a popular humorist, Marx conjectured, Mark Twain had shied away from the radical implications of the indictment his book was making. In contrast, though, James M. Cox argued that Mark Twain had no reason to be fearful of the genteel tradition:

> In saying that the ending of the book discloses a failure of nerve and retreat to the genteel tradition, it seems to me that Marx is completely turned around. Surely the genteel Bostonians [among whom Mark Twain lived and wrote] would have applauded the moral sentiment of antislavery and political freedom which the novel entertains.

The Civil War was over, Cox was pointing out, so that it hardly required nerve to express antislavery sentiment (especially among genteel Northerners whose sentiments had always been abolitionist). No more did it require nerve, it can be added, for Marx and other twentieth-century critics to rail against slavery. On the contrary, it was very much in the spirit of the genteel tradition for them safely to do so. Their insistence on the unequivocal denunciation of slavery may have the appearance of a politically concerned challenge to genteel acceptance of the status quo. But in its adherence to currently acceptable social attitudes it turns out to be a form of self-congratulation – in other words, a return to the genteel tradition.

Today's antislavery critics, in fact, respond conventionally to the one element of genteelism with which Mark Twain himself can be justly taxed: his adoption of the sentimental formula in nineteenth-century

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boys' books, wherein the bad boy turns out to have a good heart. Henry Nash Smith showed how this sentimental cliché lurks even in Huck's crucial "I'll go to hell" scene (against which Leo Marx measures and finds wanting the remainder of the book). In it, "there is a covert suggestion," wrote Smith, "that Huck is dramatizing himself, that he has an inkling of the falsity of the moral stance of his conscience." That is, despite pretending otherwise, Huck knows that his decision to help Jim is morally right. Proclaiming his willingness to go to hell therefore has in it a touch of self-dramatization just slightly out of keeping with his undeniable purity of motive.

Smith's analysis need not seriously undercut a scene that he himself agrees to be "one of the high points of our literature." But his analysis does expose the chief critical hazard presented by *Huckleberry Finn*: the temptation for the reader to find in the book expressions of his own enlightened attitude toward slavery. Smith calls attention to the way post-Civil War Northerners indulged themselves in "complacency" and "intense self-righteousness" regarding slavery. That Mark Twain shared these attitudes is evident from his enthusiastic participation in gatherings at which politicians flattered postwar audiences by evoking the evils of the slave system they had defeated. For all his ability to shock his contemporaries, Mark Twain was, as Santayana remarked in his essay on the genteel tradition, susceptible in part to its sanctimonious lures.

Susceptible, too, have been those modern critics who express disappointment at Mark Twain's failure to achieve a higher moral purpose. It is as if, infected by the slight element of cant in Huck's go-to-hell speech, they have come down with after-dinner cases of righteous high-mindedness. To be sure, the critics are not wrong about slavery. But they fail to detect how they have come to use it for their own self-aggrandizement. As a result they have lost sight of how slavery, for all its importance in *Huckleberry Finn*, might be subordinated to a larger conception of freedom.

In the years following Leo Marx's essay of 1953, race indisputably grew to be a central issue in American politics and society. As it did, the antisegregationist wish of 1950s criticism evolved into progressive wishes typical of developments in the sixties, seventies and eighties. First, Lionel Trilling's saintly Jim began to seem too passive. William Van O'Connor, for example, complained as early as 1955 not only that Jim was badly treated in the last adventure but also that he was saddled with a minstrel-show-like gullibility earlier in the book.

In the sixties' atmosphere of emerging black pride, the emphasis shifted. Jim's "innate dignity" began to be insisted on, along with the "dignity and force" of his dialect. Chadwick Hansen argued, for example,

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that if one understands the conventions of the minstrel show, Jim actually transcends his buffoonish status. For in the minstrel show:

> Mr. Bones, although he seems at first to be abysmally ignorant in comparison to Mr. Interlocutor, is actually very clever and usually wins the arguments, just as Jim does.

In the same spirit, Jim's apparently mistaken contentions in arguments with Huck that Solomon was not wise and that a Frenchman is not really a man, were taken actually to express a deeper philosophical and humanistic perspective than Huck's. J. C. Furnas devastatingly put it that these interpretations of Jim's arguments were attempts to "inflate Jim into a figure from an anti-racist WPA mural." In other words, they were propaganda, not properly literary criticism. As for Jim's undeniably demeaning posture in the last adventure, in the sixties this was explained as an act of self-preservation. That is, once Jim is away from the raft and returned to his slave status, he has, as the critic Michael J. Hoffman put it, no choice but to reassume his "slave traits," just as Huck must resume his acceptance of society's attitudes towards slavery. Both decisions illustrate how "the forces of society are stronger than the individual's will" – another formula in the spirit of the 1930s criticism that Leo Marx wished to revive.

In the late sixties, there was yet another reversal. Black activists had begun to find expressions of sympathy on the part of whites patronizing, and this new perspective, in turn, made its way into criticism. Huck's very befriending of Jim became suspect, and resentment at the demeaning of Jim reasserted itself. Resentment returned, that is to say, among white critics, who have not let go of it since the late sixties. Black critics of *Huckleberry Finn*, however, tended to have a different attitude. In 1984 the *Mark Twain Journal* asked nine black critics to contribute to a special issue, "Black Writers on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* One Hundred Years Later." In their essays none of the critics indicated any doubt that Jim was demeaned, nor was there any question that this circumstance disturbingly reflected racism on Mark Twain's part. But despite their pain at the humiliations Jim undergoes, these critics did not doubt, either, that the reader is given "the author's most powerful evidence of Jim's humanity." Earlier, Ralph Ellison had observed:

> Twain, though guilty of the sentimentality common to humorists, does not idealize the slave. Jim is drawn in all his ignorance and superstition, with his good traits and his bad. He, like all men, is ambiguous, limited in circumstance but not in possibility. . . . Jim . . . is

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not simply a slave, he is a symbol of humanity.

One of the critics in the special issue similarly asserted that Jim is elevated in stature and in fact is set apart "from everyone else in the novel except Huck." As a result, Jim emerges as "a man, like all men, at the mercy of other men's arbitrary cruelties."

For white critics, in contrast, Mark Twain's treatment of Jim had grown so unacceptable that it began to raise the question of whether *Huckleberry Finn* could be regarded as a first-rate work of literary art. Leo Marx had not quite dealt with this question, though his repudiation of everything that happens once Huck and Jim float past Cairo, Illinois, amounted to rejecting virtually half of the book. Critics who rejected still more than this – notably (despite Chadwick Hansen's defense of it) the minstrel-show-like treatment of Jim in the early chapters – were in effect rating *Huckleberry Finn* very low indeed in the scale of literary value, little as that might have been their intention.

The way out of having to devalue *Huckleberry Finn* was provided by a theory that also emerged in the late 1960s. It proposed that rather than suffering a failure of nerve, Mark Twain, especially in the ending, intended an ironic, antislavery, antiracist allegory of the post-Civil War Reconstruction period. He wrote *Huckleberry Finn* during this period, it was pointed out, even if he set its action before the Civil War. Moreover, as he wrote, the freed slaves were being duped and humiliated in ways that could be compared to Jim's treatment in the final adventure (when Tom keeps from him the news that Miss Watson has set him free). The "Reconstruction reading" permitted critics to treat the negative stereotyping of Jim as part of a charade: an ironic imitation of a period of history. The purpose of Jim's treatment was now said to be the exposure of Reconstruction as a sham and deception perpetrated on the freed slaves.

But the credibility of the Reconstruction reading depended on being a correct interpretation of both history and a literary work. Since the reading assumed an ironic intention, furthermore, Mark Twain had to have intended it. As it happens, many historical interpretations of Reconstruction emphasize the gains made by the freed slaves. And as for Mark Twain himself, he never gave any inkling, either within *Huckleberry Finn* or in comments on it, that he intended an ironic allegory. If he did intend an allegory, he did not seem to the Reconstruction theorists themselves fully to have grasped its point. For one thing, Mark Twain remained, as the Reconstruction theorist Neil Schmitz put it, "ambivalent" about Jim. That is, he depicted the cruel irony of Jim's fate after being set free, yet he insulted him with a condescension apparently no better than that directed at the former slaves during Reconstruction.

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Earlier critics had offered a convincing if unsettling explanation (which continued to be held by black critics) for this condescension: rather than being ironic, Mark Twain was himself racially condescending. If he was capable of creating the first fully human black character in American literature, he was also capable of treating that same character in terms of racist caricature. Indeed, it is known that he took particular delight in his portrait of Jim in the last adventure, selecting the most humiliating passages for stage readings to promote the book. Not even his touring partner, George Washington Cable, probably the most progressive white intellectual of the period on the race question and a fierce denouncer of Reconstruction-style racism, objected.

Given the problems inherent in the Reconstruction reading, it seems surprising that its advocates could not content themselves with advancing a less assailable but equally moral contention: that it is appropriate to remember Reconstruction when thinking about Mark Twain's novel. Whether or not Mark Twain intended to indict Tom Sawyer for deceiving Jim, the critic has every right to cast Tom's behavior during the last adventure in the dark light of Reconstruction. But the Reconstruction reading, more than attempting to elucidate a text, sought a politically correct position on the slavery issue. It followed Leo Marx's complaint that Mark Twain "might have contrived an action which left Jim's fate as much in doubt as Huck's. Such an ending would have allowed us to assume that the principals were defeated but alive, and the quest [for freedom] unsuccessful but not abandoned." In other words, Mark Twain should have made a social contribution by leaving the reader in a proper political frame of mind.

The demand for what might be called "anti-slavery instrumentalism" eventually became the leading motif of *Huckleberry Finn* criticism. Typical was the requirement implied by the critic who asked: "Does the relationship Huck develops with Jim ever have the potential power to counteract the slaveholding psychology?" Not only Jim's relationship with Huck, but also Jim's character and fate were now judged according to the degree to which they projected solutions, or at least encouraged enlightened attitudes. The outcome for criticism was inevitable: first, a reduction of literature to use; second, the devaluing of *Huckleberry Finn*. As one critic frankly concluded, "If we demand of our novels that they dramatize the movement toward the resolution of significant human problems, then *Huckleberry Finn* is a failure."

Instrumentalism made for open season on *Huckleberry Finn*. In the eighties, critics either frankly wished the book different from what it was, or else they found new allegorical meanings in it that corresponded neatly with their own political predilections. Their theories, predictably enough,

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focused on what they regarded as the chief failings of American society. In the 1985 volume of essays, *One Hundred Years of "Huckleberry Finn,"* one critic dealt with the Gilded Age (a period overlapping Reconstruction) as a time of rampant capitalism. He was convinced that capitalism brought "the classic market society form of alienation":

> . . . as a black slave Jim brings into intense focus the contradiction between humane views of the whole self and the market society view that part of the self can be alienated and as a commodity can be sold for what it will command as labor.

Not far long down the line of causation in such logic came "the violation of family ties." That "sickening disease," the same critic concludes, is the real subject of the book. Satirized are "the middle-class family as an instrument of socialization," and an economic system threatening to leave people "with no possibility of human community." Or is it that Huck, as the author of the essay, "The Education of a Young Capitalist" in the *Hundred Years* volume has it, is running away from the temptation to himself to become an exploitative, Gilded Age-style "robber capitalist"? There is no way of telling, since the critics have left off disputing one another's interpretations, no matter how seemingly divergent they may be. Critical disagreement need no longer arise inasmuch as critics are in fundamental agreement that, in one way or another, *Huckleberry Finn* indicts American society.

This indictment has triumphed not only over old-style character analysis and myth-symbol interpretations but also over history itself. After all, however one may feel about the Reconstruction period, when Jim is set free it is difficult not to recall that the American slaves were also set free. Yet several critics, without being contradicted, have denied that Jim is free. They insist that from a correct historical point of view, the American slaves were never truly set free. In the context of Reconstruction properly interpreted, therefore, as Neil Schmitz put it as early as 1971, "the notion of Jim's 'freedom' " seems actually "obscene."

In James M. Cox's 1966 formulation, modern critics tended to congratulate themselves for opposing slavery by conveniently forgetting that the reader "begins the book after the fact of the Civil War," that is, after the slaves have been freed. In the 1980s, critics maintained an equivalent genteel self-approval not by forgetting but by actively denying the same historical fact. So influential was the 1980s denial that James Cox himself proved susceptible to it. Adopting the practice of placing the word *freedom* in quotation marks, he wrote in 1985 that "the travesty of Jim's 'freedom' in the closing narrative moment reveals in a way that no other ending

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could that he is not free and will not be." Reversing himself on the freeing of the slaves and adopting the Reconstruction reading for good measure, Cox now declared that "deep down we know and know socially every day that neither we nor Jim is free despite the fictions of history and the Thirteenth Amendment."

Displaying the fervor of a convert, Cox went as far in his denunciation of America as any of the younger critics who had come to dominate criticism in the eighties. He declared himself concerned with exposing "the big national lie of freedom." The situation he saw – the year was 1985 – was one in which "we are at the threshold of George Orwell's *1984*." The reason? Covert imperialism was stifling freedom. "All this [military] defense," wrote Cox, "is being stockpiled to keep our national freedom secure from the *slavery* of rival political ideologies." He continued:

> Mark Twain recognized that the holy American nation, having fought out the battle of good and evil along the lines and under the terms of freedom against slavery, was itself moving toward the goal of imperial power.

Just what Mark Twain knew and just what the United States has become in the twentieth century are legitimate questions. But James M. Cox was not really asking them. He was displaying his conversion to the slavery-centered, anti-American reading of *Huckleberry Finn*. In contrast, black critics once again saw the situation differently. In the essays for the special issue of the *Mark Twain Journal*, they expressed no doubt about the outcome of the Civil War for the slaves. David L. Smith observed that at the time *Huckleberry Finn* was published:

> more than twenty years of national strife, including Civil War and Reconstruction, had established Huck's conclusion regarding slavery as a dominant national consensus. Not even reactionary Southerners advocated a reinstitution of slavery.

He might have added that only white academic critics expressed such doubts, and only white critics expressed a need to declare America a failure. For black critics, *Huckleberry Finn* remained a work that "reaffirms the values of our democratic faith."

In retrospect, it is possible to see that once *Huckleberry Finn* criticism had been aimed in a moral and political direction by Leo Marx's emphasis on antislavery, the forces were set in motion that would result in Cox's

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conversion thirty years later. Marx condemned "the tawdry nature of the culture of the great valley" of the Mississippi and its inhabitants. In the sixties and seventies, his indictment was widened to what one critic described as "the trivially vicious world of Tom Sawyer's America." At the same time, the Reconstruction reading fueled the language of denunciation until Tom Sawyer's pre-Civil War America was routinely treated as continuous with post-Civil War America, both South and North. To discuss *Huckleberry Finn* correctly in the 1980s, as Russell Reising summed up contemporary criticism, required "accepting the continuation of racism and political violence after the Civil War into the present."

The 1950s tendency to let politics color interpretation had developed into a positive admonition to make literature serve politics. Critics are properly influenced, Thomas and Merline Weaver could write by 1980, by "the larger culture's changed attitudes toward blacks." Critics so influenced ought to "freely acknowledge that our reinterpretation is deeply influenced by the dynamics of our culture." No one asked whether critics should be influenced by retrograde changes in cultural attitudes, should these take place. Nor was it noticed that when the progressive dynamic had shifted from favoring irresponsibility in the 1950s to social involvement in the 1960s, Huck went from being lauded to being condemned for his inconsistent, cavalier attitude toward social justice. An essentially continuous attitude of good will on the racial question produced changing literary interpretations, often by the same critics, not on account of new interpretive insights, but because of a shifting political agenda. The worth of such criticism has amounted to little more than a record of how academic political attitudes have changed over time.

The full intellectual costs of the triumph of genteel, liberal instrumentalizing can only be guessed at. To assess them, one would have to take into account the confusions and dubious historical assumptions perpetrated by the Reconstruction reading. To these would have to be added the paradoxical imposition of a wish for *Huckleberry Finn* to encourage reform, combined with such extreme vilification of its characters as to leave not one of them capable of embodying that wish. Yet the most damaging outcome of instrumentalism has been a coarsening of discourse. To set side by side virtually any discussion of *Huckleberry Finn* from the 1950s with most of the criticism written after the late 1960s is to witness a distinct loss of sophistication about how literature works.*

*Notable exceptions to the admonitory sameness of contemporary criticism are Harold Kaplan, *Democratic Humanism and American Literature* (1972), Everett Carter, "The Modernist Ordeal of Huckleberry Finn," in *Studies in American Fiction* (Autumn 1985), Burton Raffell, "Mark Twain's View of *Huckleberry Finn*," in *Ball State University Forum*

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Before criticism grew instrumental, it had begun to explore the central philosophical and cultural problem posed by the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*: that the book's American-style rejection of conventional morality does not adequately serve its protagonist in all of the moral problems he faces. The runaway ethos of Huck, for example, contains nothing within it to prevent Tom and Huck's own callous treatment of Jim in the last adventure. James L. Johnson put it this way in his book *Mark Twain and the Limits of Power* (1982):

> The most horrible thing about Tom and Huck is that in the midst of their betrayal of Jim they do maintain a grotesque innocence. There is in them no malice, no desire to harm Jim or to make fools of those around them. They are simply unconscious of any moral implications that might be attached to their play. Thus, while we may object on moral grounds to the game, our objections mean nothing.

This is, if anything, a more troubling indictment than Leo Marx's. In Johnson's reading, Huck has not forgotten his commitment to freedom, as Leo Marx charged. Instead, that freedom, because it is divorced from principle and devoted to the self alone, cannot sustain a commitment to Jim. The question left hanging is that of whence morality can be reliably derived. It is a question appropriate for both literature and criticism. In contrast, the demand for an unequivocal antislavery commitment from either Mark Twain or Huck Finn amounts to a relatively crude, and as we have seen, unsuccessful enlistment of literature in a cause.

But is the moral problem of the unfettered self, as it is revealed in Huck's last adventure, actually what Mark Twain was driving at? Johnson tries to answer this by asking why the plot contrives that Huck, though he goes along with Tom's cruelties, "does not himself initiate those cruelties." Johnson suggests that Huck's equivocal position amounts to a strategy:

> Mark Twain seeks to avoid an outright condemnation of Huck, while still pursuing a truth he was reluctant to admit: that to remain a child in the real world was not to maintain a spontaneous benevolence, but to treat others as tools and fools, as playthings to be manipulated and sacrificed on the altar of Self.

(1983), and Mera J. Flaumenhaft, "Housebound or Floating Free: The American Home in *Huckleberry Finn*," in *The St. John's Review* (Summer 1985).

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"A truth he was reluctant to admit." With this formulation Johnson is saying that the last part of *Huckleberry Finn* supplies an action that yields a valuable meaning, and that the author created it; yet it cannot be said that the author fully and explicitly intended the meaning.

Whether or not this formulation proves to stand as a final answer to the conundrums of the book, Johnson has supplied an account that is at once literarily sophisticated and morally sound. The same cannot be said for the stolid emphasis on slavery and race maintained by most critics since the 1960s. Their critical orthodoxy may testify to a generous social impulse. But the spirit of genteel self-approval with which they have imposed that orthodoxy has rendered *Huckleberry Finn* a humorless, charmless work: one lacking both literary force and the moral power to persuade.

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MARTA HALPERT

The Fifty-ninth International PEN Congress

Four hundred authors, journalists, translators, and their tourist-companions took part in the Fifty-ninth International PEN Congress this April, held in the newly independent state of Croatia. In this case, the figure "59" has only a numerical meaning, since the convention did not constitute a quorum of the organization, the result of numerous cancellations by PEN chapters all over the world. Protesting the lack of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, as well as the various attacks on critical writers and journalists, in Croatia, the Americans, Germans, and Scandinavians all stayed away. Twenty-eight PEN chapters out of one hundred-twenty demanded that the convention be postponed, and eleven member-states asked only that the location be changed.

Many meters of fax paper unrolled between Zagreb and London, from Paris to Darmstadt, before this diminished event eventually took place. The International PEN vice presidents Nadine Gordimer, Arthur Miller, and Leopold Senghor chose not to come to Croatia after all. The two remaining prominent authors present, George Konrád of Budapest and Alain Finkielkraut of Paris, were used by the Croatian PEN politicians for their own publicity purposes. Finkielkraut, the French philosopher who has helped the Croatian cause back home, was the unchallenged hero of the Croatian exiled intelligentsia and the local fan club. He even accepted, together with the Italian writer Grytzko Mascioni and the British writer Francis King, the Dubovica Literary Prize, handed over to him by Dr. Franjo Tudjman, President of Croatia and a PEN member. Finkielkraut did not question Tudjman about his anti-Semitic publications, but before the ceremony he did briefly ask the president to explain the current military clashes between the Croatians and their so-called allies, the Bosnian Muslims. Finkielkraut's question was short and to the point; Tudjman's answer very lengthy and evasive.

International PEN President George Konrád came to the congress reluctantly and obviously felt uneasy. Over the weeks before the gathering, he had tried hard to influence the Croatian organizers to cancel the congress by themselves – stressing the potential danger for all participants in a "war territory." But the Croatian PEN chapter insisted on abiding by the decision made by International PEN in 1992. The motto of the con-

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vention, "Place and Destiny," was especially chosen for the city of Dubrovnik, which only twenty days prior to the congress had been shelled again by Serbian artillery. The Croatians did not want to miss the chance of presenting the cause of their newly born country in its post-Communist development: hundreds of opinion leaders from all over the world could take the message home.

Konrád was in a dilemma. According to the PEN statutes, there was no way out of having to hold the event in Croatia, so he officially transferred it from Dubrovnik to the safe and idyllic island of Hvar, and he referred to it as a "literary encounter" rather than as a congress. Still, it was naive to believe that a country at war would relinquish the opportunity for propagandistic rhetoric. Konrád was not only misled by the organizers – who still provided that participants spend two days and one night in Dubrovnik – but his own clumsy efforts to stay equidistant from all parties involved in the Balkan war, in all his speeches, made him appear very pale, to say the least. The hardships Konrád himself experienced for many long years under the Communist regime in Hungary may be the only excuse for his weak performance. Perhaps this was the only reaction he could offer to an ill-timed and ill-placed event.

The Croatians did not mind at all. Hosting the congress gave them the green light for all their nationalistic rhetoric. Croatia has had no time yet – due to the war – to get acquainted with Western democratic rules, and the first three days of the congress were crammed with formalities that reminded everyone of former Communist times. Participants were scheduled tightly between long feeding sessions and tiring addresses given by all the dignitaries present. As soon as "Dichter und Denker" from Slovenia, France, Scotland, or Switzerland tried to turn the lame *pro forma* panels into real and open discussions, the Croatian organizers stopped them with the next sightseeing event on their agenda. At long last, when unbearable frustration finally got hold of those participants who had come here despite their skepticism, a small revolution erupted. Drago Jancar and Boris A. Nowak, two Slovenian writers, finally demanded an open and unlimited discussion. "This is becoming an historical farce," said Jancar, and Nowak assented, "We did not come here for a vacation. The organizers have turned us into abstract humanists."

The main argument of those who attended was that they had come in good faith to help tackle the problems here, where the people responsible for the situation could be confronted face-to-face, and they wanted the opportunity to do so. As one German member of PEN, Elisabeth Endres (who came to Dubrovnik despite her compatriots' refusal to attend), pointed out, "To sit in Berlin or London and criticize is more than easy." The outspoken revolt helped. Some Croatian colleagues spoke up in

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criticism of the unclear situation regarding new ownership of newspapers and the "unpleasant incidents that arose from the distribution of critical publications."

The guests from abroad focused on one article, published in the private tabloid *Globus* in Zagreb last December 11th, which denounced five outspoken female Croatian writers as "witches." The title of the article was "Croatian Feminists Rape Croatia." Two of the brutally attacked women, Slavenka Drakulic and Dubravka Ugresic (both of whom participated at *Partisan Review*'s conference "Intellectuals and Social Change in Eastern and Central Europe" last April at Rutgers University), are members of PEN. Drakulic and Ugresic were boycotting this congress because they felt that PEN had not appropriately protested the *Globus* article as they had hoped it would do. Both Danish and German PEN had cancelled their participation on the same grounds. The result of the ensuing discussion here at the congress was that regrets were expressed.

"Speak Now or Never" was the title of the booklet published by the Croatian PEN Club commemorating the 1933 Eleventh PEN Club Congress in Dubrovnik. Sixty years ago, it marked the turning point in PEN's history. There, H. G. Wells relinquished the Club's nonpolitical position in order to condemn the burning of the books and other incidents that took place in Germany after Hitler had seized power. The purely Aryan German delegation left the congress abruptly, in reaction to Wells's and Ernst Toller's speeches. Only the Austrian Jewish writer Felix Salten and the founder of the Austrian PEN chapter, Grete von Urbanitzky, followed suit and walked out too.

This coming September the Sixtieth World Conference of PEN will take place in Santiago de Compostello in Spain. Rumors have it that George Konrád will not seek reelection to the PEN presidency. "PEN has outlived itself," Alain Finkielkraut stated in Dubrovnik this spring. But perhaps it is that the moral and human expectations of a mediocre organization are pitched too high.

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LEONARD KRIEGEL

Gender and Its Discontents

In our America, writers are no longer merely writers. They are black writers or Jewish writers, gay writers or straight writers, WASP writers or native American writers, Irish-American writers or Southern writers, Midwestern lesbian writers or California bisexual writers. Peripheral issues absorb public discourse, while both talent and language are circumscribed by classification. Nor is this true only of writers. Throughout America, occupation defines identity: black dentists, Italian accountants, Jewish cops. Every day, new groups step forth to demand recognition of "our truth." The accidents of classification – sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, race – are called on to give life meaning. And among those accidents, sex and gender are now the true growth industries.

Race and ethnicity still command attention, but one senses that their appeal has begun to wane as sex and gender questions increasingly dominate cultural discourse. And not merely cultural discourse. Americans were transfixed by the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court nomination because the sex and gender battle was joined. In hearings intended to determine a mediocre jurist's fitness to sit as a judge on a mediocre Supreme Court – once the most dignified and prestigious position in the land – gender publicly wrestled with race. If those hearings constituted a debate about judicial fitness, the debate was decided when Eve bit into the apple.

The wink and leer of bodily contortions give way to the spiritual significance of gender. Even the most sympathetic observer must recognize that the American woman's quest for equality over the past three decades has produced a certain rhetorical overkill. That overkill, in turn, has now led to the latest in gender myths – the *oppression* of the American male. A "new" American masculinity, as sensitive to the temperature of its nourishment as a hothouse flower, threatens to seize the stage which feminists have worked so hard to construct. And if what is already being called by the acronym NAM (New American Masculinity), follows the example of American feminism, we will soon find its rhetoric echoed from Tokyo to Lima, from Murmansk to Johannesburg.

It is not a particularly appealing prospect. No one seems quite certain of who is "oppressing" them, but men in America have learned to weep – and they are, God help us, crying with a vengeance. As Macho Man slips toward his long-awaited death, male tears become fashionable. Indeed,

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the object of the new masculinity sometimes seems a plea for the lachrymose. All the talk about the necessity of men learning to cry brings to mind one of the worst images in English poetry, Crashaw's description of twin tears trickling down Mary Magdalene's cheeks like "two portable and compendious oceans." However ludicrous the image, she at least wept for her crucified God. No one knows what American men weep for – undemonstrative fathers, passive mothers, irresponsible sons, too-sexy daughters, a ravaged wilderness, their aching hearts, their shrunken balls.

Signs of this tearful binge are everywhere. In a bookstore in the South, I find myself ignoring a huge stack of copies of *Scarlett*, a contemporary sequel to *Gone with the Wind*. Guided by bookcases conveniently labeled Fiction, Reference, Poetry, Business, History, Current Affairs, I drift beyond bestsellerdom until I find myself at Sex and Gender Studies. Here I face the *Scarlett* of the New American Masculinity, Robert Bly's *Iron John: A Book About Men*. Let me confess that the stack of copies filled me with jealousy as well as astonishment. A decade ago, when it seemed to me that what we men suffered from was not an excess of machismo but our inability to conceive a meaningful role in a society in which gender meant less and less, I had written my own book about American men. But I wrote *On Men and Manhood* ignorant of the appeal of the lachrymose.

Iron John had been on the bestseller list for almost a year by the time I found it piled *Scarlett*-high in that bookstore. Openly envious, I bought a copy. As I read it that night, it occurred to me that *Iron John* was not a mere book, any more than *Scarlett* was a mere book. It was an event, a happening, a new Bruce Springsteen album, a flag around which huge numbers of weary American men had gathered – most of them blubbering. Ideas, style, and argument were beside the point. One could no more compare *Iron John* to ordinary books than one could compare Jean Tingueley's self-destructing sculptures to the massive solidity of Maillol's huge figures.

What is it that allows a book so obviously confused and intellectually incoherent, so pompously self-righteous and politically naive, to become a runaway bestseller? By the time I purchased it, *Iron John* had already sold 500,000 copies, with a huge paperback printing in the offing. Both its message and style are self-consciously *revolutionary* – the kind of thing one hoped we had rid ourselves of when the prospect of success and power transformed the flower children of the sixties into the libertarian yuppie stockbrokers of the eighties.

I have never particularly liked Bly's poetry, but poet friends whose opinion I value tell me his is a truly significant voice. And yet, one could offer a primer of banality from this voice by randomly quoting from his

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prose. "It's becoming clear to us that manhood doesn't happen by itself; it doesn't happen just because we eat Wheaties." Substitute any word for "manhood" – "womanhood," "fishing," "death," "paraplegia," "consciousness" – and the sentence makes as much, or as little, sense. Or try taking the symbolic leaps of faith Bly makes so facilely:

> A man's moustache may stand for his pubic hair. A friend once grew a moustache when he was around thirty. The next time he visited his mother, she looked into the corners of the room as she talked to him, and would not look at his face, no matter what they talked about. Hair, then, can represent sexual energy.

Perhaps Mother thought Sonny Boy looked ugly in a mustache. A man's mustache may stand for pubic hair; it also may stand for itself. One wishes someone had reminded Bly of Freud's cautionary "Sometimes a cigar is only a cigar."

Iron John was catapulted to bestsellerdom by the interviews Bill Moyers did with Bly on national public television. And those interviews captured the book's true importance. It is as much a symptom of the growing sense of victimization and self-pity that runs through American life as it is an analysis of manhood. Bly's book has been taken up by a culture intent on burying critical analysis beneath what late-night talk show hosts are fond of calling "creativity." What is important about *Iron John* is its reception, a reception that speaks of how terribly unsettled American men feel at this moment in history. Viewed as a cultural phenomenon, *Iron John* is worth all the attention it has received. Viewed as an analysis of men and their problems, it is silly and pretentious. Apparently, a "revolutionary" message that contains a "mythic" emphasis does not have to make sense. It must merely absorb its time, as did a now almost-forgotten bestseller of the 1970s, *The Greening of America*.

The author of *The Greening of America* was a Yale law professor named Charles Reich. Reich's ideas embraced a good deal of the intellectual softness of the late sixties and the seventies. And yet, if his ideas were banal, the eagerness with which Reich's book was embraced remains interesting. *The Greening of America* was another in that long line of prophetic works designed to burn a candle in our American darkness. Reich sought salvation not in men who wept and went through male bonding rituals that should embarrass Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts (although Reich did call for softer, androgynous men) but in men and women able to play basketball in blue jeans and eat unhomogenized peanut butter. Bly's passion for hairiness is matched by Reich's passion for

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"natural" fabrics and "natural" foods.

Like *Iron John*, *The Greening of America* was a runaway bestseller, serialized in *The New Yorker* prior to its publication as a book. While Reich did not have Bill Moyers, his book inspired critical symposia and at least one collection of essays examining its paean to the "new" American youth. (In America, newness is necessary for the advancement of even so radical an idea as eating unhomogenized peanut butter. Poets may not have gotten the message, but at least one Yale Law School professor took to heart William Carlos Williams's advice, "Make it new.")

That Bly structures his call for male bonding around a fairy tale taken from the Brothers Grimm is indicative of the problems facing men who are trying to convince themselves that they, too, are oppressed. No one can argue against the fairy tale's encapsulation of social tensions. Like myths, fairy tales possess a great deal of symbolic importance. But it is in ourselves, not in our myths and fairy tales, that we are validated as men and women. *Iron John* is as arbitrary a tale of manhood wrested from the world as any John Ford Technicolor Western. And Ford, at least, is entertaining. In the name of rugged individualism, Ford conspired with the nineteenth century's idea of manhood. Yet Ford's mythic creations, those cavalrymen dressed in blue and gold and as false to manhood's actual demands as Technicolor could make them (soldiers in the United States cavalry during the nineteenth century were more likely than not to be drifters, criminals, misfits, or teenage boys running away from home), are as accurate a representation of the masculine as the Wild Man of the Woods whom Bly wants to minister to our battered male egos.

As a Jungian and as a poet, Bly has a natural interest in myth and symbol. But in *Iron John* that interest turns him into a kind of prepubescent adolescent exposing his "primitive" self to the full view of the world. Had he been more truly political (Bly now sees politics, too, in terms of myth and symbol), he might have learned from the history of our century that primitivism decked out in symbols is a prescription for authoritarian catastrophe. When one writes about manhood, one should have a better idea of what it is than this hogwash: "The true radiant energy in the male does not hide in, reside in, or wait for us in the feminine realm, nor in the macho John Wayne realm, but in the magnetic field of the deep masculine." (Bly here achieves what I once thought impossible: He makes me feel sympathy for John Wayne, that non-soldiering Hollywood warrior.) God and Bill Moyers may understand what "the magnetic field of the deep masculine is"; I don't. I doubt Bly does either. His nonsense has its equal-opportunity equivalent in feminists who are eager to bring back goddesses and witches and who pontificate about "feminine" sensibility (neither Anna Karenina nor Emma Bovary being,

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by this sensibility's standard, "real women").

It is as easy to poke fun at Bly and the New American Masculinity's silliness about the *oppression* facing American men as it is to ridicule feminists who worship witches and believe that war would be a thing of the past if only we could bring back the great mother goddess (an idea matched by Bly's view of the Vietnam War – which, to his credit, he vigorously opposed – as a mere exercise in macho). It is easy but simplistic. American culture seems about to be swamped by gender. Yet never have men and women talked less to and more at each other. Even cocktail party conversation takes on the rhetorical trappings of Puritan primers. We are probably the first nation to succeed in making sex and gender equal-opportunity bores.

Admittedly, poets are notorious for creating systems whose function is to service the intellectual foundations of their poetry. Just reread Eliot's *The Idea of a Christian Society* or Yeats's metaphysics or what Pound thought of as "revolutionary" economics. But poets, too, should answer for their theories. When they write nonsense, they are no more Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators of the universe" than are taxi drivers or cooks. And Jungian nonsense merits as much scorn as any other kind.

In itself, gender can never be at the heart of either politics or culture. That agenda which constitutes a demand for social and political equality for all men and women, that agenda which insists individuals have the right to seek dignity as well as the right to define purpose for themselves – whether political or cultural, that agenda is worth fighting for. But this strident cacophony of voices seeking to fuse the domain of imagination and history to either a male or a female sensibility simply lies. It lies to us, and it lies to itself. As ideology, gender is deficient as well as dangerous, for it equates the idea of the self with the accident of sex. A man's ability to cry does not make him a man, any more than his refusal to cry does. A grown man tearfully telling stories around a campfire to other grown men may be many other things, but he is also a horse's ass. Courage and dignity exist, for men as well as for women, but they are not going to be learned by squeezing the primitive child out from the soul.

For the past two decades, feminists have been telling us that the personal is political. If that is so – and I believe it is – then it is high time to call it quits on both witches and warlocks. Politics – and this includes the politics of gender – remains a commonplace calling. Myths and fairy tales are all very well and good. But they work both ways. When Clarence Thomas decided to "go black" and talk not about how he had behaved toward Anita Hill nor about his views on abortion but about how he was being "lynched" because he was a black man, he assumed the oppression rhetoric of the New American Masculinity. In the process, he also unin-

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tentionally reminded us that victimization cannot be intellectual currency. Victimization is what politics is supposed to change. Politics – not myth, not fairy tales, not Halloween costumes worn to titillate a public unable to distinguish between real and fantasized oppression. Politics – that mundane art of the possible, that bent but unbroken weapon of change.

Coming in

Partisan Review:

- A Symposium on P. C.
- Fiction by Doris Lessing
- Norman Manea: The Writer and the Big Beast
- An Interview with Julia Kristeva
- Richard Pipes on Intellectuals and Anti-Americanism
- Louis Sass: *The Postmodernist Turn in Psychoanalysis*
- Pearl K. Bell: Fiction Chronicle
- James Olney on Richard Wright

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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

> Too much is expected of Art, that it mean all kinds of things and is the solution to questions no one can answer. Art is much simpler than that. Its pretentions more modest. Art is a sign, an insignia to celebrate the faculty for invention.

Stuart Davis wrote this in 1956, but the sentiment still seems appropriate. These days, art is more than ever expected to "mean all kinds of things" and be "the solution to questions no one can answer": the inequities of society past and present, the politics of race, gender, and sexuality, the devastation of AIDS, the destruction of the environment, and more. The issues are distressingly real, the artists' engagement usually genuine – no guarantee that their art is any good, but that's another matter. What's worrying is the demand that to be taken seriously, work must not only manifest such concerns, but manifest them overtly and, more often than not, with words as well as (or instead of) images. It's hard to imagine how artists could escape being profoundly shaped by their times, much less how they could exclude their responses from their work, but today's right-thinking maintains that art without unequivocal references to current issues must be devoid of meaning. It's not a question of abstraction versus figuration, but rather of appropriate allusions and/or an expression of appropriate intent.

More insidious is the widespread assumption that works of art bypass the brain, unless they lend themselves readily to verbal explication. Arthur Danto, for example, who maintains that you can no longer tell works of art from "mere real things" just by looking, offers as a useful test the object's ability to be explicated. The very notion that works of art can appeal wordlessly both to our senses and our minds has lost currency, as has the belief that aesthetic judgment, while different from moral or practical judgment, is nevertheless valuable. Perception is presumed to be so tied to the individual experiences of both maker and viewer that questions of aesthetic worth are irrelevant. Remember that article by Michael Brenson in *The New York Times*, "Quality, An Idea Whose Time Has Gone"? It's not that too much is expected of art, as Davis complained, but that not

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enough is.

If you subscribe to this new orthodoxy, the high point of the past season was the Whitney Biennial. Of course, if that was your paradigm you would have missed what were to my eye some far more interesting, albeit less modish exhibitions, shows focusing on intellectually and visually challenging art that nonetheless refused to translate easily into words. My vote for most provocative exhibit of the spring goes to *Picasso and the Age of Iron* at the Guggenheim Museum from March through June. This assembly of work by Pablo Picasso, Julio González, Alberto Giacometti, Alexander Calder, and David Smith had an odd thesis, strange inclusions, stranger omissions, curious catalogue essays, and a problematic installation, but it was so chock-a-block with splendid sculpture that the rest didn't matter very much. Marvelous pieces studded the ramp of the Guggenheim: from Picasso, the playful head made of colanders and several versions of the angular, linear monument to Apollinaire; from González, mysterious, evocative constructed heads and figures; from Giacometti, sininster "caged" bronzes and a delicately poised charioteer; from Calder, brilliant early works, a fragile improvisation on circus tightrope walkers, and some demented towers. But it was the Smiths that were most spectacular: obsessive, brooding structures from the 1930s and 1940s, fierce "personages" of the 1950s, and a cranky, elongated *Wagon* from 1962. (The show concentrated on the late 1920s to the early 1950s, with one late work from each artist for context.)

It was a treat to see the individual pieces in the show and often illuminating to see them together. Moving from González's spiny *Cactus Man* (1939), to Smith's equally bristly, but more expedient *Aggressive Character* (1947), told you much about each artist, as did seeing Giacometti's *Woman with Her Throat Cut* (1932), sprawled on the floor of the rotunda, followed by Smith's response, *Suspended Figure* (1935) on the ramp. Their differences and similarities – the Giacometti suave and elegant for all its brutality, the Smith ramshackle and loose-limbed for all its dependency on Giacometti's insect-like conception of the body – summed up much of the relationship of American and European modernism in those years. Similarly, the excellent selection of Picasso's paintings and drawings made evident the wide-rangingness of his influence, while the exuberant large-scale *Woman in a Garden* (1929-30), and small, intense constructed heads of the late 1920s and early 1930s bore witness to the effect of his intimate collaboration with his compatriot, González.

Yet irritants abounded. The show raised expectations that cross-fertilization and influences would be revealed by the juxtaposition of key works, but there were conspicuous gaps. Smith's first constructed metal sculptures (quite likely the first made in the United States) included three

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heads created in direct response to his seeing photographs of Picasso and González heads in *Cahiers d'art*. Those Picassos and Gonzálezes were present, but the Smiths were absent. Absent, too, was Giacometti's fragile *The Palace at 4 A. M.*, 1932-33, a work that haunted Smith through the thirties and forties and provoked some of his most powerful and enigmatic sculptures – four of which were among the show's standouts. That *The Palace at 4 A. M.* isn't made of iron was clearly not the issue, since most of the included Giacomettis were bronze, while the catalogue states that for the purposes of the show, iron was not only a specific material but "a metaphor for the crisis that arose in society and the avant-garde itself between the two world wars," a crisis loosely defined as a conflict between humanism and modernism. (Whether this was evident in the works in the show is another question.)

Moderately-scaled sculptures, like people, look good at the Guggenheim, despite the way objects must be seen sequentially, framed as though they were in shop windows. *Picasso and the Age of Iron* looked handsome; even the slightly overwrought bases that compensated for the slope were generally acceptable. But who decided to jam so many of the sculptures against the wall of the ramp and restrict our view of them to a single side? For Smith, particularly, this was disastrous. It's true that his work is often described as frontal, flat, and picture-like, but anyone who has looked attentively at Smith's *sculpture*, as opposed to *photographs* of his sculpture, will attest to its being, quite the contrary, subtly and intensely three-dimensional. Smith elicits drama from the way elements touch or from how they cut across an implied "picture plane." Many works are elusive, forcing us to search in vain for vantage points that will reveal hidden elements or clarify those facing away from us, something that is clear only when they can be seen in the round. Treating so many Smiths as though they were wholly pictorial and wholly legible from a single viewpoint badly distorted them. *The Letter*, 1950, for example, where tiny, aggressively plastic "secret" sculptures are set at right angles to rows of letters on a vertical rack, was placed against a wall. So was *The Hero*, 1951-52, which rendered the difference between convex and concave sides invisible (a too-high plinth did further damage). Similarly, the complex painting on the back of *Billiard Player Construction*, 1937, crucial to Smith's imagery, could not even be guessed at.

The catalogue essays were, to say the least, odd, attempting to make a case for including Calder and Giacometti on the basis of their having expanded González's notion of "drawing in space," and succeeding in intensifying the confusion. Carmen Gimenez's introduction was conciliatory and apologetic, Dore Ashton's article provided a good overview of the period, and Francisco Calvo Serraller's read like an obligatory piece of

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Ibero-centrism. Still, the show was full of marvelous sculptures. And Smith looked like the giant he is.

Either by chance or careful planning, exhibitions of Magdalena Abakanowicz's sculptures at Marlborough Gallery and P. S. 1 overlapped *Picasso and the Age of Iron*, affording interesting comparisons and suggesting a wealth of sources for the Polish artist's work. Giacometti's elongated 1950 figure on a wheeled chariot, on view at the Guggenheim, was echoed in the husk-like creatures balanced on iron wheels and posts in Abakanowicz's Circus series. Yet one of these, a row of little girls on a wheel-mounted beam, in the lobby of Marlborough's building, read less as an allusion to Giacometti than as a rationalization of the Smith *Wagon* at the Guggenheim, with its line-up of animated, zig-zagging shapes, balanced like flattened acrobats. Abakanowicz's weapon-like War Games pieces at P. S. 1 unexpectedly looked to me like organic versions of some of Smith's threatening constructions. Her papery, molded child-like torsos have always made me think of those poignant casts taken from the imprints of fallen bodies preserved in the compacted ashes of Pompeii, and by extension, of all those twentieth-century Italian sculptors inspired by them, so the connection with Smith surprised me.

Oddly, Abakanowicz doesn't seem to have a really sculptural sensibility. She's not so much an inventor of eloquent three-dimensional forms as a maker of tableaux. By sheer accretion, her phalanxes of mute, headless torsos, arms pressed tightly to their sides, can be extremely moving, as her blurred, mask-like heads are when they are seen in groups. Small variations in the "mass-produced" figures and heads become more visible, the spaces between them become charged, the difference between concave black and convex front becomes something other than expedient. Her isolated figures on wheels and plinths were less convincing; their side and back views often seemed unconsidered. I kept longing for the vital pull of limb against limb in Degas's magical *Little Dancer Fourteen Years Old*, a sculpture I'm sure Abakanowicz knows and perhaps even evokes deliberately in her preadolescent female torsos, although she doesn't seem to have absorbed it fully. (It may be that she knows her sources best from photographs, which could explain a lot.)

In a few of the Circus series, the hollow figures were animated by compression and arching, creating welcome tension between molded figure and four-square support, and offsetting the emphasis on craft (a possible legacy of Abakanowicz's history as a weaver) that sometimes dominates. This tension was most intense in one of the best sculptures, *Furgon*, 1992, where a headless, armless male figure faces a cage-like wheel from the end of a narrow, flat steel bar, balanced like an acrobat about to vault. *Furgon* depends on dialogue among blunt molded torso,

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crisp linear wheel, flat plane, sturdy support, and the intervals between them. It is possessed of a sculptural and material physicality that paradoxically makes method less important than result, so that the image becomes metaphorical, rather than literal.

According to the catalogues' rather fulsome essays by Michael Brenson, one of Abakanowicz's most ardent admirers, multiplicity and contradiction are the key to these works. He tells us that the *Hand-like Trees*, enormous hollow bronzes like blasted olive-trunks with a nod at the myth of Daphne and Apollo, are "sorrowful yet priestly, bereft yet aristocratic, barren yet beginning to sprout." He is equally inventive in his associations with the earliest work in the show, *Embryology*, (1978-81; seen at the 1980 Venice Biennale and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, in 1982), a mammoth spill of stuffed brown sacks, somewhere between giant potatoes, a rockfall, and a beach full of basking walruses. I'm afraid I kept thinking more about Giuseppe Penone's cast bronze potatoes and Oldenburg's soft hamburgers than the cosmic issues Brenson found.

Seeing Abakanowicz's works shortly after having seen the sculpture at the Guggenheim helped to situate her. She is certainly an artist to be taken seriously, but there's an extremely European preciousness about her pieces that allies her more with the elegance of a figure sculptor like Manzu, say, than with the anxious self-effacement of Giacometti or the raw intensity of Smith or Picasso. (This is not to deny the potency of her massed installations of small, vulnerable, confrontational bodies.) Abakanowicz's large-scale "tree trunks" are more problematic, just as Henry Moore's large-scale "boulder" figures are: the sculpture is never quite as good as the original natural object. For me, Abakanowicz's elaborately worked bronzes with their giant, cropped fingers failed to turn Marlborough's sculpture terrace into a sacred grove.

The politics of the art world being what they are, I suspect Abakanowicz's being a woman and from Eastern Europe contributes to the enthusiasm with which she is received. (Is it churlish to point out that despite the obvious difficulties of life in Soviet-dominated Poland, Abakanowicz has traveled extensively to install her exhibitions, is widely collected, and has received numerous prestigious awards?) The perception of woman as victim, however, seems essential to the reputation of a female artist, at the moment; witness the vicious reviews of Helen Frankenthaler's print retrospective at the National Gallery in Washington, D. C., versus the glowing tributes to Joan Mitchell's last works, seen at Robert Miller Gallery.

Frankenthaler, of course, has never presented herself as a "woman painter," but simply as a practitioner who expected her inventive, some-

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times sensuous, sometimes challenging work to speak for itself. She has, deservedly, been regarded since the 1950s as an artist to be reckoned with by anyone with a serious interest in twentieth-century painting, but the current fashion among reviewers is to declare their departure from this view, as if attempting to prove their independence of mind. Their reasoning seems to be that Frankenthaler can't be as good as everyone has said she is because she hasn't been victimized or "marginalized." (See the biographies of Frida Kahlo, Georgia O'Keeffe, Lee Krasner, Louise Bourgeois, *et al.*) A Washington journalist, Paul Richard, who revealed both a remarkable inability to see art and a stunning ignorance of printmaking, suggested that Frankenthaler has been admired only because of her relationship to important male figures in the art world. The only interesting question raised by his article is why *The Washington Post* would publish an uninformed personal attack under the heading of responsible criticism.

Joan Mitchell, who died last fall at the age of sixty-seven, was, on the other hand, roundly praised. The biographical data is right, of course, what with her unhappy alliance with the Canadian painter Jean-Paul Riopelle, and her outsider status in New York, as a resident of France for many years. But what about the work? As a group, her last paintings were stronger than those of the past few years, but they sounded the same note, floated the same arty clusters of strokes, vignette-like, against grounds of arbitrary dimensions. What's extraordinary is that these pictures were pronounced resonant and deeply felt, while Frankenthaler's and those of some of her colleagues have been dismissed as displaying "mere taste."

Mitchell's lyrical, gestural evocation of landscape is better than a lot of what's around, but it's still pretty slight; her color is less than astonishing, the scale of her mark and its rhythm predictable. The large pictures at Robert Miller seemed bombastic, their size rhetorical, rather than essential, while the smaller ones looked like Modern Art – I kept thinking of Mathieu. Mitchell was a good painter – no small achievement – whose death is to be regretted. Was she an unsung genius, a force who might have changed the course of American painting, had she not been excluded from center stage by a male conspiracy, as her fans imply? Hardly.

On the other hand, Elizabeth Catlett's exhibition at June Kelly Gallery *was* an overdue tribute to the doyenne of African-American sculptors. It was, I believe, her first solo exhibit at a New York commercial gallery and the first show of her sculpture in New York since 1971, when it was seen at the Studio Museum in Harlem. (A print retrospective was at the Jamaica Arts Center in 1989.) The show was accompanied by a handsome catalogue with a thoughtful, informative essay by Lowery Stokes Sims.

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Catlett is a carver who makes her material, whether wood or stone, wholly subservient to the simplified, geometric forms with which she constructs the body. In her best work, image and material seem inextricable. Her lifelong commitment to modernist figuration is plain – she studied with Zadkine in the early 1940s – as well as her dialogue with Mexican modernism and pre-Columbian art – she was a student of Zuniga's and has made her home in Mexico, with her husband, the painter Francisco Mora, since the late 1940s. There's a period flavor to much of Catlett's work, a kind of optimistic social realism that is completely understandable, given her history and politics, but the best sculptures were fresh and personal.

Woman Fixing Her Hair, 1993, for example, was first-rate, with its mask-like face, compelling inlaid eyes, and telling wrench out of frontality. The smoothly carved geometric volumes of the seated figure were unequivocally modernist, but at the same time called up such diverse associations as Romanesque madonnas from the Auvergne and Bamana maternity figures. *Woman Fixing Her Hair* is a tough, arresting sculpture, period. Political correctness notwithstanding, you don't need to know that its author is a tough, arresting African-American woman in her seventies, admirable as that is, to see the work's excellence.

Was it the season of strong-minded women who make sculpture? At Lennon-Weinberg Gallery, Mia Westerlund Roosen showed work related to a future project at the Storm King Sculpture Center. The prospect of working large-scale and outdoors made her think about placing forms *in* the landscape, setting elements below ground level, but allowing them to project above the surface of the earth, and her recent sculptures explore these ideas at intimate scale. "Leaves" of remarkably thin, supple-looking concrete penetrate the surfaces of steel tables, evoking traditional still-life setups, along with burial chambers, ironing boards, and in one instance, patio furniture of the 1950s. I liked best a sort of raised "trough" of steel, where fragile leaves were stacked on end, as though casually dropped into the container. The sexual overtones that have animated Westerlund Roosen's work in the past were no less present here, but they were subtler and more diffuse. The ambiguity of the recent pieces, with their rather weird conflation of genitalia and domesticity, interests me more than the explicitness of some earlier work, so I am extremely curious about what we will see at Storm King next year.

Sculpture wasn't the only thing of interest last season; there were extremely diverse shows of paintings by Matthew Radford, Michael Mulhern, and Dennis Ashbaugh, and rarely seen drawings by John Walker. Radford, who showed canvases and works on paper simultaneously at Grace Borgenicht and The Gallery, Three Zero, in April and

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May, paints lush, vigorous street scenes that place us among the dense crowds of a New York sidewalk. Half-glimpsed figures slip past; in one of the best of the series, a giant hanging clock blocks our view, making it clear that we are observing from above. Radford's broad, painterly shorthand is on the verge of dissolving into "pure" gesture, but his sure eye for tonality usually makes even the most elusive swath of color take its place as shoulder or arm, forehead or nape.

There's something of the economy (and even the spirit) of David Park's work in the best of Radford's pictures, but the palette is cooler, more urban, and more tonal. When you discover that Radford is a Londoner who moved to New York about ten years ago, it all makes sense. A British sensibility comes to terms with the New York street. But that's mere anecdote. What counts is that Radford is a serious, ambitious *painter* with a marvelous sense of the possibilities of his materials, a respect for the history of his discipline, and an individual point of view.

Michael Mulhern's April show at Stephen Rosenberg Gallery, his third there since 1988, was his riskiest and most thoughtful to date. He has been consistent in thinking of painting as a synthesis of object and surface, but his new works present this with more conviction. Earlier, Mulhern built up surfaces that you could see into: nervous, unstable interweavings of color that seemed to happen as you looked. The black and white versions were especially tense and effective, oddly evoking both Giacometti and Cubism with their monochrome hatching and stroking. Mulhern most recently has added aluminum to his palette and abandoned "woven" facture for pours and runs of fairly opaque paint, applied to thick, small-scale canvases. It's as though he has made a conception of Abstract Expressionism into both subject and object. ("Reification," I think, is the word some of my colleagues would use.) See what I mean about risk?

Mulhern's pictures, which once seemed the result of the combined exercise of will and hand, now appear more dependent on intuition and the character of materials. Scale is crucial, not only of the "mark" but of the size and thickness of the canvas itself. There's danger of the rivulets and pools of paint becoming too complicated, just as there's danger that the aluminum paint will refuse to read as a color and might simply reflect light. In the best pictures, spontaneity and intention coexist happily. The most successful manage to be meaty and lyrical at the same time. They are pugnacious and elegant paintings that make us think about the nature of abstraction itself.

At first acquaintance, Dennis Ashbaugh's large, broadly handled pictures, at Marisa del Re Gallery this spring, seem connected to the tradition of American abstraction. Blocks of soft-edged color floating against

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saturated grounds, smudges of earth tones emerging from surfaces like ancient walls had immediate associations with Adolph Gottlieb's Imaginary Landscapes, Mark Rothko's glowing rectangles, even the overscaled heroics of Clyfford Still. Yet the more you looked, the more systematic Ashbaugh's pictures became. Stacks of blunt rectangles started looking like disembodied images on a screen; titles took you into the realm of genetic codes and technological shorthand. Was this just cunning marketing in an era when "straight" (as opposed to ironic) abstraction is suspect? Ashbaugh has said that he turned to science and technology as sources simply in order to have something to paint about, to stave off boredom, yet it's arguable that his use of motifs and images given by, say, genetic mapping is not very different than an earlier generation of abstract painters' adoption of repeatable formats of their own devising, formats that allowed them to forget about composition and concentrate, as Ashbaugh does in his best work, on color, surface, and touch.

Does one have to know that his most Gottlieb- or Rothko-like paintings derive from images of DNA or that one picture, which evoked Frank Stella's stripe paintings of the early 1960s, was based on a computer screen blasted by a virus? Maybe not, since these generating images are, as yet, not part of most viewers' terms of reference. Whatever their origins, Ashbaugh's paintings are sensuous, accomplished constructions with unusually rich surfaces, gorgeously painted or exploiting untraditional materials such as corten steel. Learning about their avowed subject brings you up short, since it is so at odds with the tradition of self-revelation invoked by the pictures. (Well, except for the "Stella stripe.") At the same time, Ashbaugh's analogy between the images of state-of-the-art science and postwar American art can't be entirely ignored. Is this irony or a successful integration of high modernism and high technology? I've heard Ashbaugh speak about it, and I'm still not sure. But he makes some of the better paintings I've seen recently.

John Walker's works on paper, at Victoria Munroe Gallery in May, were a surprise and a pleasure. I had been disappointed by his show of recent paintings at Knoedler Gallery, some months ago; the pictures seem clotted and congested, as though feeling was being stifled by matter. But the rarely-exhibited works on paper – which rang changes on similar motifs, ambiguous, blunt-edged forms, strung together like a chain of molecules – were luminous and utterly moving. Walker's repetitive all-purpose shape has unexpected associations. Strangely volumetric and *present*, it suggests not only primitive pottery but also landscape forms and the masks and skulls that have haunted his pictures for years.

The drawings breathed and floated. Strokes, washes, and bleeds played major roles in their drama. Imagery asserted itself and withdrew,

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now emphasized by the density of paint or engulfed by it. Even if you knew nothing of the British-born Walker's sojourn in Australia, his gray and earth-toned palette, like his swelling shapes and rhythmic spotted patterning, powerfully evoked primitive and aboriginal art. At the same time, they seemed like earmarks of Analytic Cubism, as though Walker had somehow reinvented Modernism's intimate connection with ritual artifact, with his stay in Australia standing in for Picasso's visits to the Musée de Trocadéro. All in all, a wonderful show.

The centennial of the birth of the watercolorist Charles Burchfield (1893-1967) has been marked by the publication of his collected writings and, among other things, a fine selection of early work shown at Kennedy Gallery in April and May; another exhibition will be seen at the Drawing Center this summer. Burchfield is a puzzling artist. Apparently a modernist, although isolated from any real contact with other modernists, he was an intense romantic, a visionary who animated anything he chose to paint, as though revealing hidden spirits in trees, houses, cloud formations, and the like. Yet there's something engagingly vernacular about Burchfield's mysticism, an almost cartoon-like liveliness. The show at Kennedy, which spanned 1915 to 1922, revealed a wider range than I had expected, from relatively straightforward, high-key, vaguely Fauvist landscapes and farmscapes, to highly-charged, dark, brooding views of ramshackle buildings that turn unlovely parts of the American scene into transcendental symbols. I'm eager to see what will be at the Drawing Center, given their record of superbly chosen and superbly installed exhibits.

One of the most entertaining shows of the past season I came across entirely by accident; passing through Williamstown en route from Middlebury to Yale, I took the advice of Professor Lane Faison and stopped at the Williams College Art Museum to see a show he recommended "in spite of the title." *Hot Dry Men, Cold Wet Women* proved to be a fascinating survey of how seventeenth-century theories about the humors, and their influence on character, appearance, and behavior, were reflected in depictions of the period. For once, a revisionist theory was enlightening. I'm not sure I was entirely convinced by some of the exhibition's contentions. The convention of depicting male figures with ruddy skin and females with pale, for example, may reflect seventeenth-century theories about the respective influence of sun and moon, Mars and Venus, and all the rest of it, but surely it also has some basis in the difference between how and where the sexes spent their time. But it was an immensely interesting show that offered an opportunity to study an impressive group of Baroque paintings, drawings, prints, and objects, both for their intrinsic merits and for newly revealed meanings.

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BOOKS

Freudian Frolics?

IN DEFENSE OF SCHREBER. SOUL MURDER AND PSYCHIATRY. By Zvi Lothane. Analytic Press. $59.95.

MADNESS AND MODERNISM. INSANITY IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN ART, LITERATURE AND THOUGHT. By Louis A. Sass. Basic Books. $30.00.

It is generally accepted that psychoanalysis is old hat, that biological and pharmaceutical cures for mental disorders are cheaper and more successful. Yet scholars keep producing myriads of learned works about Freud and his disciples – their motivations, families, friends, cultures, history, etc. The names of Freud's followers who a decade ago were known only to a few have become household words to many. Details of Freud's only visit to America are being reinterpreted; boyhood and later letters are being printed; relationships and theories are being rethought in connection with subsequent discoveries and speculations. What accounts for this burgeoning interest in the most microscopic details of psychoanalytic lore, and in its gossip? Is it due to the fact that academics need to publish in order to get tenure? If so, why pick on a subject that is considered part of history – at a time when history itself is being discarded as yet another fossil in our postmodern age? In other words, what makes for the fascination with the origins of a theory which is allegedly dead, and whose radical origins either are being refuted or – unconsciously – adapted?

In 1958, at a large conference organized by Sidney Hook at New York University, the then-leading philosophers and psychoanalysts concluded that psychoanalysis was so controversial and impossible to pin down because it is so many things – therapy, theory, metapsychology, and philosophy – whose realms get confused. Since then, however, these strands have not been untangled. On the contrary: As America developed into the therapeutic society *par excellence*, psychoanalytic applications and explanations came to permeate every department of psychiatry and nearly every humanistic discipline. And yet, psychoanalytic knowledge, despite its chameleon-like qualities, is not cumulative: each time it purports to answer one question, it opens up at least two new ones. Leaving aside theoretical innovations, as well as psychoanalytic hermeneutics and Lacanian and deconstructionist analyses – which by their very nature are open-ended and lend themselves to interminable free associations – more and more historical and philosophical studies as well are being produced by fairly mainstream, practicing psychoanalysts. Dissatisfied with earlier

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clinical interpretations, they often get into the minute details and circumstances of Freud's and his followers' assumptions and conclusions. Basically, the separation of psychoanalysis into various intellectual realms has proven to be no more than a heuristic device, an indeterminate and temporary conclusion.

Inevitably, Freud's own prolific output dominates this reevaluation industry. Now, some psychiatrists and psychoanalysts who begin by reflecting on a case of Freud's (or of Sandor Ferenczi, Otto Rank, Melanie Klein, etc.) while treating a patient, often get bitten by the researcher's bug and end up writing histories. Others, while pondering the impact of their patients' general environments on their symptoms, or the impact of the intellectual climate on the dynamics of their patients' neuroses, start by focusing on philosophical and metaphysical problems and then explore the relation of pathology to culture. Although Freud did all of these things, he did so at a time when belief in positivism was at its height. The current contributions, however, tend to separate and discredit the positivistic elements – along with earlier credos – in order to "update" specific ideas.

The two books under review marvelously exemplify these disparate approaches. They demonstrate also that even though general history has turned into an unpopular subject, the history of cases and of diagnoses over time still fire the imagination. Readers' interest in these efforts, I believe, indicate the success of the Annales School of radical history which elevated the previously neglected history of the underside and underclass, and these studies make up for the general history that no longer gets taught. In addition, the search for the "me" tends to trigger questions about the structures it is embedded in – which leads back to the Freudian unconscious. Both Louis A. Sass and Zvi Lothane are practicing psychoanalysts and professors. The former tackles the slippery and complex connections that are said to exist between madness and modernism; the later dissects Freud's and his followers' assessments of the Schreber case.

Why would anyone want to bother to research a case of Freud's – one which most American psychoanalysts have considered unimportant in view of the fact that Freud had never met Schreber and was speculating on his brilliant, though admittedly delusional, *Memoir of My Nervous Illness*? Was it because this memoir led to the author's release at the end of the second of three institutionalizations? Are Schreber studies yet another new discipline, I asked myself, as I – reluctantly – picked up Lothane's heavy book. Apparently, they are not.

According to Lothane, "modern debate on this study broke out all over when the American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst W. G. Niederland . . . created a sensation in 1959 . . . [with his] mind-capturing thesis . . .

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that the images and sensations in Paul Schreber's psychosis were derivatives of the way his father, Daniel Gottlob Moritz Schreber, M.D., tortured his son by means of posture-improving orthopedic appliances and other educational methods." This view was enshrined after Morton Schatzman, another psychiatrist, more or less transformed Niederman's premises into a best-selling book, *Soul Murder: Persecution in the Family* (1973), which assured Schreber a unique place in the (currently popular) literature on victimization. If Lothane could disprove the roots of Niederland's and Schatzman's assumptions then he would weaken clinical theories, mostly involved with ego psychology, that center on the influence of early childhood trauma on adult psychopathology. He set out to do so by tracing the minute ups and downs of Schreber's illness during his confinement, and compared these to the relations he had with his caretakers – psychiatrists and family members.

Lothane tells us that he began to doubt Freud's diagnoses of Paul Schreber as paranoid and homosexual – as well as the depictions of Schreber's father as a sadist and child abuser – after coming across Schreber's *Memoirs*. Curiosity led Lothane to unearth existing bibliographies, letters and archives, to interview Schreber's surviving relatives, and especially to explore the interactions Schreber had with his psychiatrists, along with the latters' own scientific biases. In the process, Lothane not only speculated about Schreber's relationship to his psychiatrists and to his wife Sabine and mother Pauline – all of whom have been neglected in the psychoanalytic literature – but provided a partial, yet excellent, social history of psychiatry during the nineteenth century.

Contrary to accepted lore, Lothane ascertained and documented that Schreber's father had been a respected physician as well as an influential and enlightened educator. Following in the footsteps of, among others, Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland (1762-1836), Moritz Schreber advocated macrobiotics based on disease prevention through diet, daily exercise, sexual hygiene along with moderation (even in marriage), and good moral habits that start in childhood; and he wrote about these topics for the public throughout his life. He also preached that strength is based on love, that children be treated with kindness, benevolence and forgiveness, and ascribed mental illness to moral lapses – to succumbing to passions, vice and unreason. In the introduction to his most influential book, *Kallipädie* (1858), Moritz Schreber stressed the importance of physiology and psychology, and "developing in the child good and right habits, [to] prepare it to pursue good and right later in life, with awareness and free will." All in all, Moritz Schreber emerges as a forerunner of progressive education, as the exact opposite of what was assumed about him in the psychoanalytic literature: a man who traumatized his infant son by shackling him to

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a posture-improving appliance, the straight-holder. This ludicrous perception, maintains Lothane, "is due to the horrific imagery created by the exaggerated descriptions of these allegedly immobilizing and pain-producing appliances by Niederland, and the even greater distortions by Schatzman." These beliefs, he continues, were fostered by the interpretation of certain hallucinations and delusions Paul Schreber experienced at the Sonnenstein clinic during his second hospitalization, rather than by mistreatment at the hands of his father. Would someone who advocated that infants not be swaddled, that they be kept *completely free from restraints*, really act totally against his preachings when it came to his own infant? Lothane discovered that restraining gadgets were prescribed only for older children for limited periods, to improve their posture and avoid nagging them; and that Freudians have unthinkingly accepted the exaggerated and wrong interpretations of pathological and homosexual components in both the father's and the son's personalities because they have set out to reaffirm Freud's sexual theories.

Lothane sets forth convincingly the thesis that all elaborations of the Schreber case underplay or even ignore the power of directors of mental institutions, and of family members. Paul Schreber's first psychiatrist in the *Nervenanstalt* was Paul Fleschig, whom he referred to in the *Memoirs* as "God Fleschig." Lothane describes in great detail Fleschig's background and training, his clinic and the pride he took in it, as well as how closely his personality, and his professional experience and beliefs, resembled those of Schreber's father. But Fleschig was an organicist, totally uninterested in treating mental disorders by psychological means, even though he was sensitive to forensic issues. He assumed, for example, that the antidote to morbid excitation of the brain, the "heat of drives and feelings," is found in mental-spiritual thought centers, and judged "anatomical predispositions" by measuring the size and form of the brain. Yet he was aware that a diagnosis of psychosis could have Schreber declared incompetent and thus deprive him of his civil rights. He was allied also with Schreber's wife Sabine, who trusted him and whom he treated. Only during the second confinement did he side with her and banish Schreber to Sonnenstein, to institutional psychiatric treatment in a state hospital.

Paul Schreber depicted his next psychiatrist, Guido Weber, who had written on pathologies of the brain, as the " 'God' who dealt with corpses." According to Lothane, Weber would have wanted to preside over a clinic like Fleschig's, but Sonnenstein was being flooded with chronic patients, so that Weber was caught between wanting to send them to custodial institutions and holding on to the less troubled patients. Schreber fell between the cracks: his habits of bellowing, and of declaring himself to be a woman, worked against his timely release, and Weber

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kept him confined after his mental health seemed to have been regained. In any event, Schreber was lucid enough to recast the meaning of his madness in the forensic terms that finally, in an appeals court, won his release. Unquestionably, Schreber was a casualty of changing and opposing beliefs on the treatment of mental illness at a time when legal codes and existing mores were being challenged. He had to play David to his psychiatrists' Goliath. And he stood out because he produced a memoir while diagnosed as insane, an activity the trial judges found only a sane individual could undertake. Had Freud not made of him a *cause célèbre* to "promote" psychoanalysis, he would not be remembered.

Lothane aptly concludes that casting Schreber as a paradigm has obscured him as a person. Since Freud never met Schreber, he could only analyze his *Memoirs* – by a "*hermeneutic* method of decoding universal symbols, or applying assumptions and generalizations derived from psychoanalytic theories." Among psychoanalysts, this practice has fallen into disrepute, mostly because current academic reading of "texts" has often been confused with psychoanalysis proper – even though it is totally divorced from therapy. However, this literature also has highlighted the inordinate power over life and death held by authorities such as Drs. Fleschig and Weber. By adding the intrapsychic, clinical dimension which this type of textual criticism leaves out, Lothane not only has shown that some of Paul Schreber's ideas were based on those of his father – his concern with evolution and spontaneous generation, the importance of truthfulness, some of the prescriptions for health – but also that interpersonal, dynamic psychoanalysis is superior to ego psychology.

Whereas Lothane neither employs Michel Foucault's so-called discursive method nor his textual strategies, his historical analysis of Paul Schreber's fate in the context of his surroundings is reminiscent of *I, Pièrre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister and my brother . . .* (1975) and of *Herculine Barbin* (1980). Foucault, too, was fascinated by the impact of the new knowledge and diagnoses in medicine, on their legal repercussions, and on the way these were being played out in individuals' lives. But he always ended up focusing on the impact of the dominating power and knowledge. Louis Sass follows in Foucault's footsteps. The similarity is already evident in the Prologue to *Madness and Modernism*:

> The madman is a protean figure in the Western imagination, yet there is a sameness to his many masks. He has been thought of as a wildman and a beast, as a child and a simpleton, as a waking dreamer, and as a prophet in the grip of demonic forces. He is associated with insight and vitality but also with blindness, disease, and death; and so he evokes awe as well as contempt, fear as well as condescension and

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benevolent concern.

Like Foucault, Sass goes on to delineate the contradictory views about images of insanity, about the "madman as a kind of Blakean tiger of the night" and the origins of such perceptions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought. Sass's erudition is impressive, as he traces the innumerable beliefs about madness to the philosophies of, among others, Plato, Sophocles, Hobbes, Kant, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Jaspers. He then links these beliefs to the personalities and quirks of writers and artists such as Dostoevsky, Goya, and van Gogh, whose genius allegedly benefited from their afflictions. Although Sass stresses the increasingly fragmented character of modern literature and art, he is fully aware of the pitfalls of too close an association between madness and modernism, and tries to anticipate all criticisms. He carefully points out the contradictions contained within his various arguments and interpretations as he moves along. In the process of tracing and elaborating every conceivable belief in, and manifestation of, schizophrenia, Sass provides a fascinating history of ideas. However, the connections between madness and modernism remain as tenuous as they always have been, ever since Freud and his followers, and literary critics of every persuasion, have tried to document their causal relationship.

Basically, Sass maintains that the twentieth century is "characterized by the pursuit of extremes of exaggerated objectivist and subjectivist tendencies or by unrestrained cerebralism and irrationalism . . . [which are] understood either as expressions of an extreme self-consciousness or as rather desperate attempts to escape from alienation and hyperawareness." Because both schizophrenics and works of art demonstrate lunges into these extremes, and mediations between them, Sass explores the dynamics of (ideal-typical) schizophrenic symptomalogy and ends up, each time, with the words of a famous figure who allegedly exemplifies the "the modern or postmodern consciousness." Thus Sass ultimately connects the emotional experience of, for instance, the truth-taking stare (following the surrealist painter de Chirico, he calls it *Stimmung*) to Octavio Paz's poet who, "in a sort of fury, wants to rip the mask off existence in order to see it as it is . . . immersed in its own clarity and brilliance, . . . directed toward this transparent death." He relies heavily on case reports by psychoanalysts and psychiatrists, frequently takes issue with the diagnostic personality categories as described in the official DSM-III and DSM-III-R diagnostic manuals, and draws conclusions from projective tests, including Rorschach and the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) – and then moves from a discussion of the spatial forms perceived by schizophrenic patients to, for instance, a short story by Alain Robbe-Grillet. And he

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finds that "the characteristics that make schizophrenic stories unlike the standard narrative form are much the same as the stories that differentiate traditional from modernist literature in general." And in their modernist versions, Sass notes, artistic and literary productions are fictions which break down the sense of causal coherence. Inevitably, Sass comments on Schreber: on the menacing character of his illness, his inner voices, and on his bizarre actions during his psychotic periods. Again, Sass ends up understanding this madness "as the expressions of a quintessentially modern frame of mind – a condition depicted in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*," citing the latter's conceptions of panopticism and of body and soul.

Sass realizes that questions about the insanity of the artist, and about the creativity and authenticity of the madman, have been raised since antiquity. However, he distances himself from these debates by evaluating judgments about forms of hyperreflexivity and detachment, asking "whether *these* qualities should be viewed as a source of insight or of illusion, of life or of deadness. Do they express or do they betray the deepest truths of the human spirit?" As Sass contrasts, for instance, romanticism, modernism and postmodernism, and differentiates among types of schizophrenics, he makes clear that he does not cast the schizophrenic as the modernist hero. Nor does he offer any concrete judgment about "this condition of obscure origins and no established aetiology, pathogenesis and pathology." His erudition and range are as impressive as his analyses of types of schizophrenia. But I still am not convinced of its causal links to modernism. Had it been fashionable to write books about "tradition and madness" in "traditional" times, I wonder, would *that* have been the connection to excite the imagination of scholars? True, modernism and postmodernism alone have encouraged experimentation with minimal and fractured texts, and explicitly zeroed in on the blank spaces between words. But we're no closer than Freud, than all the poets and writers throughout civilization, to fathoming the depths of the human unconscious and its relation to art. My own (unanswerable) concern, therefore, is not whether modernity and schizophrenia are Siamese twins, but why Freud's admittedly dated ideas continue to captivate not only psychoanalysts such as Lothane and Sass but also the bevy of readers who claim to reject psychoanalysis. Is it because you can't keep good history down, or because, as Freud said, "the voice of the intellect is a soft one, [that] does not rest until it has gained a hearing"?

EDITH KURZWEIL

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Higher Education

THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY: A REEXAMINATION. By Jaroslav Pelikan. Yale University Press. $30.00.

THE IDEAL OF THE UNIVERSITY. With a New Introduction. By Robert Paul Wolff. Transaction Publishers. $19.95.

LOOSE CANONS: NOTES ON THE CULTURE WARS. By Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Oxford University Press. $19.95.

For all the recent flood of books about conflict within the university, comparatively little has been written about the university itself. Much the greater part of the outpouring is about contemporary disputes and controversies over the curriculum of the humanities, mainly in the departments of literature, or over the racial and female representation in faculties and student bodies and the treatment minorities have received. Subjects of this kind have been given generous attention in these pages and have suffered little neglect in other journals.

In the meantime universities, together with institutions calling themselves universities, have multiplied in number and their students enrolled at an unprecedented rate. And with their proliferation, confusion and doubt have increased about what the university really is – about the very idea of the university – its mission and purpose, its values and responsibilities, its component parts and their relation to one another, even relations between faculty and students, not to mention those between university and society, the state, the military, and corporate enterprise. All this in addition to staggering budget deficits that threaten the university's future and its very survival.

These are the kinds of subjects addressed by Professor Jaroslav Pelikan of Yale in *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination*. The subtitle has reference not only to the antiquity and perennial recurrence of such questions, but also to the classic work on them that dates from the middle of the previous century and the title of which Pelikan consciously paraphrases for his *Reexamination*. This is of course John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*. Jacques Barzun calls Newman "the greatest theorist of university life," and J. M. Cameron says that "modern thinking on university education is a series of footnotes to Newman's lectures and essays." Pelikan thinks of his predecessor's work on the subject as the most important "ever written in any language," and describes his own book as a "dialogue with Newman."

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In spite of marked differences in their backgrounds, Pelikan declares that his book "takes its stand where Newman's does, and it carries on its dialogue with him there." Here is the descendant of sixteen generations of Lutheran priests, the author of a five-volume history, *The Christian Tradition*, who is writing about the ardent Protestant convert to Roman Catholicism who became Cardinal Newman. Pelikan can take this stand because Newman makes it clear in his preface that the object of the university is "intellectual, not moral," nor is it religious. That makes his thought accessible to those of any religious faith and those of none at all, to critics as well as champions of "Western civilization," and to believers in the unity of the human race amd in the principle that the whole world and all humanity are the appropriate context of scholarship. This means "the ability to tolerate fundamental diversity of beliefs and values without sacrificing conviction." And it requires the maintenance of academic freedom.

Along with agreement on some issues come disagreements of importance on others. For one thing, Newman was firmly convinced that teaching was the all-but-exclusive mission of the university, a prevailing conviction of Oxbridge in his time, and that research required distinct gifts and should be done by individuals so endowed in quite separate institutions. The German idea of a university combining research and instruction and requiring professors to be qualified in both areas was slow to take hold in England. Pelikan readily admits that he "stands in opposition to Newman's judgment" about teaching and research and holds it to be "a distinctive and defining characteristic of professors who teach at the university that they be scholars," scholars actively engaged in research and publication, whatever the qualification for teachers at colleges and other educational institutions.

That brings Pelikan to the relation between research and teaching. He is clearer in his demand that university professors must be engaged in research than that researchers be required to teach and admits that distinction in the one does not necessarily guarantee distinction in the other. But he does believe that undergraduates should be taught not only what is known but how it was learned, and that such teaching by scholars is the best way to recruit "the next generation of scholars" – so long as it is teaching and not recruiting disciples.

For the best undergraduate education, about one-third of what is learned comes from fellow students, one-third from professors, and another third from the student's own efforts. For graduate students the last portion is larger, and Pelikan celebrates the occasional rite of passage when master begins to learn from student and the experience of teacher-student collegiality arrives "filled with joy." He takes pleasure in quoting

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Alfred North Whitehead as saying:

> The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest for life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning.

With reference to "teaching undergraduates from all over the college, rather than the teaching exclusively of graduate students from the professor's field," Pelikan says it is "the best possible forum for relating one scholarly discipline to another," and promoting their mutual stimulation. It is somewhat surprising that he fails to mention one reward of advanced teaching that many lifelong teacher-scholars have experienced, and which he undoubtedly also has: the rich opportunity it offers for trying out new ideas, testing theories, and discovering effective ways of presenting new findings. The two callings, teaching and writing, can complement and sustain each other.

Since the Middle Ages, most reputable universities have included at least four "faculties," three of which we now call professional schools – law, medicine, and theology. A faculty of philosophy, now known as arts and sciences, was the fourth. It is from this latter discipline that what came to be called liberal education is largely derived. Newman believed professional training should be preceded by a liberal education that would teach the student "to think and to reason and to compare and discriminate and to analyze," that would produce a student with a sharpened mental vision and a refined taste. Pelikan agrees with Newman on this point and holds that professional training belongs within the university because, as Newman said, outside it the student "is in danger of being absorbed and narrowed by his pursuit."

Apart from the faculty members, who do most of the writing about the university and are likely to claim most of the attention and the major role in it, there are other vital institutions within its walls that deserve more credit and acclaim than they normally get – for example, the library and the press. It is good to see full justice, long denied them and their servants, done them in this book. Pelikan's tribute to the library is eloquent: "No single institution in the contemporary world of scholarship has a greater bearing on the future of the university than the library." It takes pride of place not only as "the scholar's workshop," but as custodian of the common memory "in an age of mass amnesia." And further, "There is nothing so ecumenical as the library," for, to quote George Crabbe, one of Newman's favorite poets,

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> Here, their fierce rage subdued, and lost their pride,
> The pope and Luther slumber side by side.

To his words on the nature and mission of the university press Pelikan brings many years of experience as chairman of the publication committee of the Yale University Press. Publication, in his words, is "a fundamental psychological, indeed almost physiological imperative that is rooted in the metabolism of scholarship." It is through publication that "research remains honest by exposing itself to the criticism and correction of other scholars." But it is a legitimate concern of the university press as well as the Ph.D. mentor/midwife of dissertations that readership not be limited only to other scholars and that results of research be presented with "clarity and grace." If the object of the university is "diffusion of knowledge," as Newman had it, then its press is the widest *potential* means of attaining its object – but only if its publications can be made readable. Insisting on "language of sensitivity and taste" seems a bit much to an old mentor/midwife like this reviewer, but it is worth trying.

If some of these aspirations seem a little high-flown for our sordid times, Pelikan is quite aware that the university is not only a contributor to the society in which it is rooted but dependent upon it as well, and that "if either of these partners is sick, the other suffers as well." In this connection he devotes a chapter to "Duties to Society," in which he readily admits there is at present sickness in both society and university. Faculties and administrators are morally and practically obliged to devote serious effort to correct these ills, both extramural and intramural. But their first obligation is to address failings and flaws within their own walls. In all countries the university remains the unique gate, ladder, or channel of opportunity. If it allows itself to degenerate into a private club, it impoverishes itself as well as those excluded. It is obliged, therefore, to "go on striving to eliminate from its own programs of student admissions and faculty appointments as well as from its curriculum the vestiges of discrimination and prejudice against race, class, or gender that still remain."

We are warned, however, that reckless pursuit of this worthy policy is "potentially as hazardous to the students whom it is intended to benefit as it is to the university, for it can run the danger of debasing the educational currency in the very process of redistributing it." Another policy which Pelikan warns against sounds, as we shall see, strangely like a policy *promoted* by other critics of the university:

> So easily, however, can diagnosis turn into advocacy, and so subtly can a center of research on social change transform itself – or allow itself to be transformed – into a cell for galvanizing a society into ac-

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> tion to accomplish such change, that the university urgently needs to find new ways of protecting the freedom of inquiry without allowing itself to become the tool of the polarities of nation, race, class, and gender that will continue to shape the ideological climate both outside and inside the academy.

A great deal more than this is to be mined from the thoughts of this learned and wise academician, but limits on space confine me to one additional nugget. Here is Pelikan's job description for a university president: the conductor of an orchestra made up entirely of composers."

The book by Robert Paul Wolff, *The Ideal of the University*, bears a title very similar to those under which Newman and Pelikan wrote, but there the similarity abruptly ends. Now a professor of philosophy at the University of Massachusetts, Wolff first published this work in 1969, when he was on the faculty at Columbia, and reprinted it in 1992 without acknowledged alteration. Rarely has the date of a publication been more faithfully reflected in its contents. A few samples from the book should serve both to illustrate differences from Pelikan's and Newman's books and to evoke the spirit of '69.

As Wolff fondly recalls, in the background of his reflections are stirring campus scenes of the late 1960s: student occupation of buildings, disruption of classes, deans and presidents taken hostage, resistance to police, protest marches and counter-marches, "revolutionary communes . . . the real thing in the making." In those days, if his secretary replied that the president was tied up at the moment, one did not know whether to call back or call the police. All distinctions were abhorred as "discrimination," and equally abhorrent were all claims to authority, whether those of tradition, faculty curriculum, or administration. Wolff often professes himself in rapport, if not in complete agreement, with the spirit (if not always with the letter) of the student demands. Many popular slogans of the time find lodgment in his book.

Granting that the radicals were in a minority, Wolff holds that "the rebels are the best students," regardless of grades. As for the danger of politicizing the university, he contends that "every campus is now politicized, necessarily and unavoidably" and that neutrality is a pretense. He warns the rebels, however, that "they benefit more than any other segment of the university" from this fiction of neutrality, as well as from the farce of supposed "free speech." He advises them to "hide behind the slogans of 'lehrfreiheit' and 'lernfreiheit' " and enjoy whatever liberties they can.

In Wolff's opinion, the function of the university in 1969 was "taking in lively, eager boys and girls and spewing forth precision-tooled

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Establishment Men." The markets for the product were "the corporations, government agencies, foundations, military services *and universities*." He deplores the "craziness" and arbitrariness of admissions procedure. As for claims to authority, they have "no place whatsoever in any of the characteristic relationships of a university." In a chapter entitled "Why Should a University Be Governed at All?" his answer is that it should not be governed at all – save in areas of students' living arrangements, endowment administration, degree certification, and personnel employment and student fees and subsidies.

Apart from these elemental controls, Wolff demands "All Power to the Faculty and Students" as "the fundamental principle of governance in American colleges and universities." Later on he is tempted to "endorse the principle of student participation in all academic decisions save their own certification." Random admission would replace aptitude tests, professional schools would be kicked out and with them grades and degrees. But how are faculty and students to take authority away from administrators and trustees "and vest it in themselves, where it belongs"? The answer, he says, is quite traditional and simple: *"Solidarity!"* And here he visualizes faculty and students meeting "in a body near a tennis court" (1789 and all that?) to vow that "henceforth they will be governed only by men of their own choosing and laws of their own enacting." He thinks that once a "a great Ivy League university" took such a step, the movement would "sweep all before it and usher in a new era of university governance in America."

I suppose it is of some importance to learn that such fantasies still exist and that there are still those around who entertain them. Apart from that sobering information, a few of his ideas would seem to be worth further thought. Those of us with long experience in teaching graduate students will have reason to deplore the ever-lengthening period required to earn the Ph.D., now averaging more than seven years – as compared with only three years required for a law degree. Yet both degrees serve essentially as professional certification. A few gifted graduate students do prove capable of combining the professional training with demonstration of real creative scholarship and making the combination an exciting apprenticeship. I have been privileged to see that happen repeatedly. But for most students the dissertation is a frustrating, sometimes stultifying waste of precious years. It would make sense to debate seriously Wolff's proposal to limit college teaching certification to three years, eliminate the dissertation, and leave demonstration of genuine creative scholarship to those capable of it until later, with the support of research grants and the guidance of senior scholars.

It remains difficult, however, to know how to take the proposals of

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Professor Wolff, for his ideas are not always consistent and can be quite self-contradictory. In the new introduction, presumably intended to justify reprinting what he wrote earlier, he says, "I have moved considerably farther to the left than I was in 1969. With an exquisite historical sensibility, I have become a serious student of the economic theories of Karl Marx just in time to witness the official worldwide declaration that Marxism is dead."

In *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. does not undertake to write about the university, either as an idea or as ideal, but about a marginal controversy over the place of what is variously known as multiculturalism, diversity, pluralism in the humanities curriculum of the university, and the part black studies should play in all this. He has no apology for the attention he gives the subject for, as he says, it has been featured "on the covers of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U. S. News & World Report*; in television . . . and in hundreds of news items in this country." What more could one ask?

His book, with a few exceptions, is made up, he says, of pieces that "originated as talks prepared for oral delivery, and have been altered very little since." He admits right off that "there are significant differences in perspective and emphasis" among them, that some profess "a confidence greater than I can now muster," while others seem "insufficiently critical" and still others "excessively critical." He feels "pangs of misgiving" about the book because it records "what I was doing when I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing." Such candor invites a measure of forbearance from his critics.

Gates is right in saying that multiculturalism has been the subject of "ferocious attacks," but more significant is his awareness that much of the ferocity has been intraracial. There is ferocity of advocacy as well as of opposition. The fierceness of advocates often arises from deeply felt resentment of racial injustice, but it can take some rather extreme, irrational, and even bigoted forms. Among them are claims by one or another group of black supremacy; Afrocentricity; the rejection of Western culture and the simultaneous claim that Africa was mother of it all; the violent anti-Semitism of the Nation of Islam; and the spreading belief that racial separation rather than integration is the cure for segregation. Gates passes over some of this in silence and some with gestures of impatience or outright opposition, but his main contribution to restoring sanity is a lightness of touch and a touch of humor. The lightness (paradoxically) is illustrated by the pun in the title, *Loose Canons*; the humor by two essays that are spoofs of the culture war in the guise of Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade, spoken out of the side of the mouth. If his influence and his reputation as superstar of black studies at Harvard had to be won by relentless

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pursuit of publicity, it may have been worth the price.

More doubtful is the cost of concessions he felt obliged to make to extremists in his ranks. Literacy, he declares, "can be the most pervasive emblem of capitalist commodity functions" – whatever he (and Houston Baker) meant by literacy. "We write for each other," he says, and "This is a critical trust. It is also a *political* trust." He lets go unreproved those who use the slur of "cracker," the last racist epithet but for "redneck" permissible in the academy. "Now we must at last don the empowering mask of blackness," he writes, "and talk *that* talk, the language of black difference." Only then can we "test the dark secrets of a black discursive universe . . . the black arts of interpretation." Yes?

But then in his concluding essay Gates pronounces "wrongheaded" both the "cultural right" and the "cultural left." He is engaged, he assures us, in "the search for a middle way." He is tired of a "righteous indignation [that] became routinized, professionalized," and the counterposed victims and victimizers. Already he can wonder if "success has spoiled us," and admits it to be "a thing of wonder" that black letters may have already moved "to the center of the profession of literature" and that because of laws of supply and demand, black scholars in the field "find themselves pursued by several departments competing to make imaginative job offers." (He should know.) Indeed some of us think the appearance of black writers on required reading lists may soon seem no more shocking than the appearance of American history and writers on the Oxford syllabus – which occurred first in the 1920s. Of course that does not necessarily make black writers Homers or Virgils or Shakespeares or Miltons, any more than it did the white American writers when Oxford put them on their lists in the twenties, however loose the "canon."

C. VANN WOODWARD

Radical Disenchantment

THE GRANDEUR AND TWILIGHT OF RADICAL UNIVERSALISM. By Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher. Transaction Publishers. $39.95.

MODERNITY ON ENDLESS TRIAL. By Leszek Kolakowski. University of Chicago Press. $24.95.

Few authors have written more illuminating pages in the history of the twentieth century's literature of disenchantment than Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller, and Leszek Kolakowski. Both Heller and Feher, former

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students and collaborators with Georg Lukacs within the Budapest School of critical Marxism, as well as Kolakowski, belong to a noble family of spirits who, in the harsh conditions of state socialism, tried against all odds to give a good name to the Marxian vision of man and history. In so doing, they contributed to the awakening of politically and intellectually rebellious currents in Hungary and Poland. As the system derived its spurious legitimacy from the ideological myth of the providential role of the Communist Party, Marxist revisionism contributed to the disintegration of the elite's supercilious self-confidence. It would thus be impossible to understand the dissolution of the ideological monolith of Sovietism without referring to the intellectual guerilla war waged by these philosophers in the late 1950s and the 1960s against the bureaucratic watchdogs of the senile aristocracy.

The odyssey of Marxist revisionism is one of those cultural adventures that included romanticism, idealism, the brutal end of naive hopes, and the ultimate discovery of the source of evil in the long-worshipped paradigm itself. Indeed, the story of this odyssey is what the aforementioned authors try to tell: how they have reached a sense of history's multifaceted reality and broken with the universalistic radical beliefs that had inspired their initial search for Marxist humanism. Their experiences with Marxism in its institutional, sclerotic and repressive version, as well as with the alternative, critical Marxism embraced even now by a plethora of distinguished academics in the well-protected Western enclaves of free thought, are especially instructive in light of the inglorious collapse of communism in the East.

Their testimony offers a voice of lucidity. What they tell us is that Marxism could not offer effective solutions to human ailments because such solutions do not lie in utopian projects, but rather in the gradual construction of a rational community of free individuals. Instead of contributing to the building of such a liberated order, they argue, Marxism became, in the Soviet experiment, the name for bondage and oppression. It became the faith that numbed critical faculties and justified some of the worst attacks on individual freedom. Marxism, bastardized and vulgarized, turned into the religion of a bureaucratic scavenger class known as the *nomenklatura*. As Kolakowski points out, Marxism was a product of modernity. But this is precisely the source of its ambivalence. On the one hand, Marxism celebrated the values of modernity (technology, progress, industrialization, all the components of the bourgeois civilization); on the other, it deplored the loss of the cosmic unity of premodern times and denounced the alienation that it attributed to the greed and selfishness of the bourgeoisie. Kolakowski observes:

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> Marxism was a mixture of an unequivocal enthusiasm for modernity, rational organization, and technological progress with the same yearning for the archaic community, and it culminated in the utopian expectation of the perfect world of the future, in which both sets of values would be implemented and make a harmonious alloy: modern factory and the Athenian *agora* would somehow merge into one.

The breakdown of the messianic teleologies by the end of the twentieth century, the end of the eschatological belief in the goddess History, has left space for a more modest, essentially skeptical approach to issues of conflict, order, and stability in modern societies. This farewell to the redemptive paradigms formerly called radicalisms (of leftist or rightist persuasion, it doesn't matter any more) is brilliantly captured by Heller and Feher in their kaleidoscopic survey of the phenomenology of the secularization of Marxism. By becoming mundane and revealing its ambiguity, by abjuring its salvationist pretense, Marxism has ceased to inspire collective passions and neuroses. This leaves many intellectuals with a sense of bitter abandonment: what are they going to believe in and what idols are they going to serve? After all, the end of ideology, correctly diagnosed by Daniel Bell in his pathbreaking essay published several decades ago, seems to have resulted in a vacuum of oracular creeds. True, there is nationalism, and there is the Fukuyama-style, thundering glorification of the "end of history." But are we really dealing with an end of history? Is modernity completely exhausted? And what role can be discovered for intellectuals when they seem to have lost the opium they needed (remember Raymond Aron?) for their continuous warfare with the status quo? For Kolakowski, the issue is to overcome the idolatry of politics, to rediscover the true bonds that keep politics together in a civilized manner. His anguish is primarily linked to the disappearance of the frontier between good and evil, and to the postmodern (and neo-Nietzschean) attempt to completely relativize our traditional moral norms. At the risk of shocking his former admirers on the left, Kolakowski goes as far as to state that "it is perhaps better to believe in the validity of apparently silly taboos than to let them all vanish." Indeed, if the major achievement of intellectuals in this century has been to suspend and question the legacy of the bourgeois experience, if many of them have done their best to use blinders in their reading (or misreading) of the totalitarian inferno, then it is perhaps useful to invite them now to a much-needed mental housecleaning. Kolakowski's book, full of biting irony, is precisely a call for intellectual responsibility, perhaps the one quality this social group has superbly disregarded for the last hundred years.

Although some of the most atrocious experiences of the century were

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successfully engineered in the name of modernity, and used its weapons, for Kolakowski, as for the Budapest School authors, modernity in itself is neither good nor bad. For the Shoah, as we know too well, was the triumph of the atavistic racialism championed by the Nazis, and no less disturbingly the victory of the principle of instrumental rationality directly linked to modernity. In the same vein, the historicist project, as emblematically synthesized in the Marxian project, led to a hypostasis of Reason that could be cynically manipulated by the Asian despot in the Kremlin to pursue his most murderous designs. Indeed, as Heller and Feher demonstrate, we are now living in a time dominated by the sentiment of a debacle of historicity. Their obituary of radical universalism is justified by the rational conviction that postmodernity means primarily an awareness of the cunning of history and a recognition of the pitfalls of intellectual hubris. The arrogance of intellectual prophets like Nietzsche and Marx, who thought they knew what universal history was about and found it appropriate to issue guidelines for the advent of a heroic-liberated mankind, has lost all legitimacy. As the Hungarian philosophers explain: "The historicist project was less concerned with narrating history from the beginning, more interested in a hypostatized 'end of history.' But these ambitious claims ended in Auschwitz and the Gulag." Precisely because the fascination with the end of history, conceived as a mandatory culmination of a rationally constructed *telos*, led to the barbarism of the extermination camps, the postmodern political condition tends to be extremely suspicious of all universalistic pedagogies. Our age is thus distrustful of prophetic exhortations. We have seen enough of these constructions and we know that they are usually cover-ups for dictatorial propensities. On the other hand, are we supposed to relinquish all holistic vision? Is utopia forever doomed to irrelevance? Do we have to indulge in a moral relativism no less devastating than the absolutism it tends to replace? Do we need to accept the supremacy of various mini-discourses that dismiss as hopelessly sterile the great axiological topic of humanism versus barbarism? In this respect, I agree with Kolakowski and the Hungarian philosophers: the Enlightenment should be deconstructed not in order to deny the value of the individual and the significance of reason, but rather to assert these values and to detect the origins of the moral and political catastrophes of our age.

Finally, these authors have reflected in a painful and truly sobering way on the fallacies of historicist universalism. They have realized that promises of immediate, in-this-world salvation through collective action can result only in penal colonies and infinite human suffering. They have also noticed the complicity of intellectuals in the accomplishment of scenarios associated with the romantic delusions of total community and

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anthropological reconstruction (the Nazi-Stalinist chimera of the "new man"). After their romance with Marxism, they acquired the awareness that the world is not a laboratory for social engineering and that ignorance of this elemental truth is the premise for countless disasters. Their voices often sound depressing, but this is not their fault. When one has had to live for so long in the company of the devil, it is hard to maintain an angelic silence.

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

The Way They Lived

THE TATTERED CLOAK AND OTHER NOVELS. By Nina Berberova. Alfred A. Knopf. $21.00.

LOVE AND GARBAGE. By Ivan Klíma. Alfred A. Knopf. $20.00.

A FEAST IN THE GARDEN. By George Konrád. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $23.95.

THE MIRACLE GAME. By Josef Skvorecky. Alfred A. Knopf. $22.95.

> Why was it that horror, cruelty, and affliction made themselves felt so easily, became concrete and weighed all the more heavily, whereas everything sublime, gentle, unexpected, and full of charm cast a frail shadow across the heart and thoughts, so one couldn't touch it or look at it closely or feel its shape and weight?

Such is the question a woman asks in the first of Nina Berberova's six novellas, "The Resurrection of Mozart." Like a keystone in the archway leading to this century's sorrow, it's a question that could be asked by any of these writers, for all of the novels under review here concern themselves with the long history of suffering and repression prior to 1989 that has been the trademark of East European and Russian letters.

On the other hand, what happens when atrocity is replaced by confusion? What is the effect on literature's role when moral outrage is supplemented by political chaos or ennui? How does a writer continue to document the sorrows of the past in order to preserve their human memory, amid both the freedom and political struggles of the present? In the last couple of years this has certainly been a growing question for East European writers and intellectuals, and though most of the later work re-

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viewed here was written on the eve of change in 1989, one can already see the concerns surfacing. Just as the novels of Klíma, Konrád, and Skvorecky grasp at clear characterizations and plots that compel, they also reflect the lack of clarity and direction in the societies from which they spring. This means that these writers are engaged with their cultures, and struggling to create meaningful work within them. However, the question remains whether or not their work can rise above the confusion rising out of the democracies they helped to create, or whether repression continues to be, sadly enough, the more focusing muse.

Berberova's work, however, seems immune to such flaws, for hers is a voice that speaks with the sense of immediacy that comes from living directly on the struggle's front, rather than in the disarray of the aftermath. Initially published from the late 1930s to the 1950s, her six "novels" (really novellas at most) span seven decades, taking as their subject matter the difficult lives and loves of Russian émigres living in Paris after having fled the Revolution. Though one character observes just after the war, "the past, their common forty-year past, was more real than their shabby and soulless present," Berberova's characters avoid mere nostalgia, for she never romanticizes the exiles into pure and innocent martyrs. Instead, we see the cold-hearted behavior of a Russian insurance salesman that leads to the suicide of a young woman in "Astashev in Paris," or the desperate scramble for love and security as a woman throws herself at any man she can find in "The Waiter and the Slut." The result is that, by turning an unflinching eye toward the pathetic, Berberova captures the real pathos of her characters and the manner in which their lives seem lived out before they have even lived them.

"Somewhere there was the rapture of happiness and the tyranny of fate," thinks a young girl in the book's title piece. Though she thinks it in the St. Petersburg of 1920, it's the same thought she experiences later in Paris, where in struggling through yet another war, "you had to chide yourself . . . that this was Paris – silk, lace, champagne – not Oboyan or Cheboksary torn between Whites and Reds, not 1920 but 1940, 1941, 1942, and the earth was revolving around the sun as before." Nonetheless, rapture and fate are much of what the novellas are about, "The Tattered Cloak" coming full circle when the narrator is confronted by a shattered Samoilov, the man who early in life whisked her sister Ariadna off her feet and eventually to an early death in outer Siberia. Begging forgiveness, both he and the narrator know there is none left to give, that too much is past, too many deaths have occurred. Still, it is the heart's urging that is most real, for despite the melancholy that pervades her life, the narrator finds that what is "being revived in the face of everything (as it was twenty years ago) inside me might – very approximately and clumsily – be called a search for grandeur, a thirst for wisdom, love,

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and truth, although all these words are just part of one infinite thing that I seem to skirt without actually seeing."

Wisdom and love exist everywhere in Berberova's passionate and moving fiction. Chekhovian in its sense of nuance and irony, Tolstoyan in its ability to touch the purity of hope and despair without becoming sentimental, her work marks a last installment in the great line of nineteenth-century Russian literature, but one that has been transposed to the harsher plots of the near past. Because of her sweep and control, Berberova rises above the sorrow she is forced to depict, and it is this defiant sense of nobility and human worth that best characterizes her vision. At the end of "In Memory of Schliemann," the book's final novella, set in 1984, the narrator states, "What amazed me about that vision was its conjunction of horror and beauty . . . something I had lived with, something I had grown used to, something I had made peace with, I think." Here, as elsewhere, one hears the voice of Berberova herself, humane and masterly to the end.

Though Josef Skvorecky's impish protagonist, Danny Smiricky, has been a humane, if not deliciously comic presence in previous novels such as *The Cowards* and *The Engineer of Human Souls*, *The Miracle Game* shows his character growing a bit thin in Skvorecky's effort to set the novel in the Czechoslovakia of 1948, 1968, and the 1970s, all at the same time. The central event that bridges the different eras is the mysterious movement of a statue of St. Joseph during a priest's sermon in a small country church. This takes place in 1948, just after the Communists have come to power. Danny happens to witness the event, though not quite completely, because he's catnapping during the service. Years later, however, he still finds himself caught up in the mystery of whether or not it was a genuine miracle, a Communist ploy to discredit the church, a cruel hoax that led to the priest's death by torture, or all of the above. In between, Danny continues his familiar lusty pursuits, proving, as a character says of him, that he remains "a human boy-child among the comrades."

And so, too, Skvorecky. His has always been an aesthetic of the comic and the ribald surviving in the face of the lethal and dour machinations of tyranny. His fondness for detective fiction also keeps weighty matters of historical outrage afloat on a bubble of suspense, though loose ends never quite get tied up in neat resolutions. Rather, mystery and absurdity resolve themselves into just that – more mystery and absurdity. " Life is a whodunit and the perpetrator is truth," thinks Danny towards the end of the novel. "It's a bad whodunit. The perpetrator always gets away."

All of this is well and fine as musings about the absurdity of life under the duress of an absurd society. The question that rises, however, is

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whether after four hundred pages it's enough to simply say that "life is a bad whodunit," and then run the risk of the book appearing to be the same. For, in fact, the weakest aspect of *The Miracle Game* is its plot, the meal ticket of good detective fiction. Too often Skvorecky rambles in his narrative, jumping from the mystery of the supposed "miracle" in 1948, to the hysteria and excitement of the Prague Spring of 1968, then back to Danny's earlier romance with one of his students when he was a teacher in Hronov, where the "miracle" occurred, then off to America in 1970 to muse about the failure of the Czech revolt. In between he provides a smattering of the many tragedies that occur amid the political turmoil, but in covering so many, they have a tendency to cancel each other out. The result can be that the reader comes to feel like Danny when he notes that "I suddenly felt as though I were watching a Shakespearean drama performed by the Hronov Puppet Theatre," all sense of weight and depth having disappeared from the characters.

This no doubt corresponds to the senselessness and lack of meaning that must have pervaded the nightmarish years spent enduring the cruelty of puppet regimes, as well as the lack of an informed purpose and direction experienced even more recently. However, the passages on young Danny's troubled romancing of the ingenue Vixi are the book's most vivid. In these we know Danny best through his irrepressible ardor, and Vixi provides a lively and playful presence that is often lacking elsewhere. When Danny is in the present all seems drab and dreary, broken and corrupt, as it no doubt was. But so, too, does the novel, whenever it gets lost in rambling around the spook house of history. Everywhere ghouls and goblins jump out from the shadows, but often at the expense of the novel's little train seeming to have gone off track.

Similarly, halfway through Ivan Klíma's *Love and Garbage*, the narrator exclaims, "I am not going back and I am not going forward, I am standing in a void, I am standing between two fields, at the meeting point of two calls which intersect each other, I am nailed to the cross, how can I move?" Though this refers specifically to the narrator's inability to choose between his psychiatrist wife Lida and his sculptress lover Daria, it's also a lament about the stasis of life in Czechoslovakia under the old regime, as well as the dead end in which the narrator finds himself as a writer in a society that will not allow his work to be published. Hence, if only to see life from another side, the narrator decides to become a street sweeper, cleaning up the rubbish of Prague while also sorting the rubbish of his own confusion and despair.

"Rubbish is immortal," thinks the narrator, "it pervades the air, swells up in water, dissolves, rots, disintegrates, changes into gas, into smoke, into soot, it travels across the world and gradually engulfs it." The same

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can be said of the alienation that pervades Klíma's Prague. As a writer, the narrator finds that "I had been living in a strange kind of exile for the previous ten years, hemmed in by prohibitions and guarded sometimes by visible, sometimes invisible, and sometimes only by guarded watchers. . . . I was afraid that the silence which surrounded me would invade me, paralyze my imagination and kill my plots."

Engulfment and paralysis, then, are very much what *Love and Garbage* is about. Unable to leave his lover, unable to find fulfillment in his work, the narrator has no choice but to devote himself to the jetsam of thought itself. Ideas on the essay he is writing on Kakfa in his spare time, considerations of his fellow sweepers and their broken lives, hatred of the "jerkish" spoken by hacks and bureaucrats, meditations on God and paradise, or the lack of both: all of these constantly turn themselves over in the windy passages of the narrator's mind, a lost alley glutted with rubbish from the world around him, while he must try to make sense of it all as he tends to his street sweeping and the "cleansing" of his life.

Part fiction, part literary essay, part political and religious tract, Klíma's novel is itself a kind of literary landfill. Throughout, paragraphs have the quality of someone's pocket notes set loose to the wind, landing here and there on the page in haphazard fashion, though a kind of sense remains. What is lacking, however, is a sense of progression. Just as Skvorecky's whodunit gets bogged down by trying to cover perhaps too much of history, Klíma's refuse pile of meditations gets trampled on by the narrator's own endless despair. He himself says of Kafka, "By writing, Kafka not only escaped his torments, but only thus was he able to live at all. In his notes, letters and diaries we find that he never tried to put into words what he thought of literature." At the end of the same paragraph, however, the narrator does write about literature, observing, "Literature without those who receive it is nonsensical anyway, as would be a world where no other language was heard than jerkish, where language could no longer make anyone respond, not even someone above human beings." In fact, it's hard to feel that Klíma's narrator, unlike Kafka, ever escapes his torment. There is, of course, no reason that he should in order for the book to be successful, but given the entrenched alienation he experiences, as well as how interior his world remains, it can be difficult for readers to feel as if the novel is really speaking to them.

George Konrád leans toward the same use of arbitrary fragments as Klíma in *A Feast in the Garden*, if not more so, for rather than merely jumping from paragraph to paragraph, his sensibility refracts reality through the prism of each new sentence. Even more than the above works, Konrád's novel is a sprawling web of consciousness, his narrator David Kobra stating, "Communication in this book will remain in that

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borderland between reflex, fable, and testimony, where I myself am not certain what actually has happened or how. . . . Sentences in a dancing, zigzagging relation to one another, yet also independent."

The same can be said of the zigzagging relations of the characters that emerge, for besides Kobra, the host of relatives and lovers that speak to each other across the years represents a cross section of Hungarian society and its history. There is the émigre János, who returns from a teaching post in America to become the lover of Melinda. She is married to Antal, a filmmaker, who doesn't seem to mind the liason, and they all know Zoltán, the former Marxist who commits suicide in England when he feels that Hungary is becoming too Western. Meanwhile, Kobra in later years has taken up with his daughter Regina, her mother Klára having been his first cousin. Hence, incest would seem the norm of Kobra's world, but it represents more a tool of survival than it does scandal. Forced upon one another in the effort to stay alive through the hard years as children in the Holocaust and then through the years of Soviet repression, the later years find all parties understanding what they have had to endure and how they have helped each other endure it.

Yet, as Kobra states, "This is not a novelistic novel, because guests keep arriving; there are more and more of us. So many, in fact, that not everyone knows everyone else, and – behold – we experience in these pages what we do in life: We don't know what will happen next." In this Konrád is certainly consistent, for often it is difficult to even figure out just which character is speaking, the narrative voice sometimes shifting mid-chapter. The author does make clear that all of the voices in essence belong to Kobra, for the conceit of the novel is that, as an older writer looking back on his life while sitting at a stone table in his Budapest garden to write this novel, Kobra is writing himself through others. "The hero of the following story is born in these pages," he proclaims at the start. "He is an extension of the author; he is, in fact, the author's nightmare, drawing his life force from the author's blood."

Thus, it would seem that Konrád has also ignored Kafka's refusal to write about literature. No sin in that, but in a novel that goes on to trace the lives of Kobra, his friends and relatives, and how they survived both the Holocaust and the Soviet machine, the danger is that such dire stories can seem too much in service to the literary constructs fueling the novel. Konrád manages to escape this for the most part, the passages on Kobra's childhood and survival seeming the most grounded. But in being moved by them, one wonders all the more about the need for the elaborate house of mirrors that surrounds the more straightforward narration.

History, of course, must still seem a house of mirrors in which writers such as Konrád continue to feel lost. Hence, the question asked by Berberova's character at the start still remains, though in a quite different

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sense for some of these writers. For Berberova the lines are clearly drawn as a result of the direct experience of exile and atrocity, thus making it easier to keep one's eye on the "sublime, gentle, unexpected, and full of charm" while enduring the "horror, cruelty and affliction." The others have also experienced atrocity, often heroically so, but theirs is the more difficult task of delineating the consequences of historical despair in present-day reality, as well as in the consciousness that seeks to unite both. Unsurprisingly, a pervading sense of alienation is the result, for despite the clarity of past evil, the present is no more likely to bode affirmations of the good. This is a sobering thought, and it's to the credit of Skvorecky, Klíma, and Konrád that they convey powerfully the sense of frailty and fragmentation that accompanies it. In doing so, they once again enable us as readers to stand in their shoes, maintaining for literature a serious sense of purpose in its ability to bear witness and give hope.

PETER FILKINS

Sacred and Profane

VOX. By Nicholson Baker. Random House. $15.00.

MARIETTE IN ECSTASY. By Ron Hansen. HarperCollins. $20.00.

Last year, when *Vox*, the highly contemporary, largely unprecedented novel by Nicholson Baker came out, it became one of the talking-points of the publishing world. The wonder of it was not just that the author filled one hundred sixty-five pages with nothing but two voices, talking on the phone in a single evening, but that this unprepossessing material propelled the determinedly literary Baker, bearded, balding and unabashedly "serious," to the top of the bestseller list. One reason, perhaps, is that Baker had written a tidy, user-friendly, accessory-centered diversion for baby boomers. Another, no doubt, is that its theme, like its title, is a three-letter word ending in "x."

Baker's calling card, some would say his strong point, has always been his eagerness to write about what other people ignore (and what some of us think ought to be ignored). His writing is nothing if not self-conscious – the case to be made for it is that it is about self-consciousness – and its famous effects come from its ability to pry open moments, to gaze at pimples, to dwell on all the intimate things we keep to ourselves, the things that break through self-consciousness, and so make us most self-conscious of all: picking one's nose, say, or indulging in lowbrow trash, or

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wishing we were the man who'd written the book *Self-Consciousness*. Baker has made self-regard his subject and his substance. And all his tiny books, hanging upon tiny moments, have in fact a commercially "high concept": a single-sentence summary of their contents is their best advertisement (from onanism to one-Updikemanship). Baker has the courage, and the vanity, to make his own mind the theater and protagonist of every one of his books, and to assume that its contents are worth the price of admission.

Though not one of his admirers – tending to find long sentences easier to pull off than short, and oddities less difficult to portray than quiddities – I nonetheless confess that *Vox* has its moments. For one thing, the form of the dialogue has forced Baker to abandon the impenitently mandarin style that has become his trademark, and to work with a new directness and transparency that prove, in fact, highly workable. He also does, inarguably, have a gift, now and then, for seeing the mundane with such fresh eyes that he all but refashions it: when he likens the red and yellow lights dancing along a stereo system to the nightscape of a city, I realize that I will never look at a stereo system in quite the same way again. When *Vox* is about words (for which Baker has an all but unrequited passion), or about secret domestic pleasures (which he has marked off as his terrain; reading William James in a McDonald's restroom), when *Vox* is about intimacy, Baker can show off his zoom lens to good effect. The trouble is, however, that one man's explicitness is invariably like another's, and as the book goes on, reproducing the arc of sexual excitement, it inevitably grows less distinctive, and traces the trajectory from Philip Roth, say, to *Forum*. Though the novel is expertly paced and skillfully handled, it is finally about itself. Its theme is its content, and shamelessness is its point.

By happy circumstance, though, another book came out recently that is also short, intense, and exciting enough to be read in one sitting. Yet Ron Hansen's *Mariette in Ecstasy* could not be more different from *Vox*, and not only because it is set in 1906, with an almost all-female cast, in a French nunnery where women speak Latin. For Hansen creates a whole zone of highly charged sensuousness, and a world so tremulous with suggestion that every event has meanings both sacred and profane. The privations of a convent are famously fertile ground for loose imaginations, of course, and it is not hard to evoke a sense of ardor and passion play amidst candlelit cloisters, young girls in white and a world of whispers. Yet Hansen does much more than that: he creates so vivid a force-field of energies that everything becomes almost unbearably charged with the intensity and agony of longing: pivotal words – "yields" and "thighs" and "tongue" and "hurt" – palpitate through the narrative, and the worship-

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pers themselves, lost in self-mortification, possessed by Christ, alight with raptures and yearnings, literally act out the sensuous transports of the Song of Songs. The theme is as old as the Song of Songs and as contemporary as the recent French film *Thérèse*. But the imagery – of blood, of wine, of kissing wounds – is so rich that Hansen all but envelops us in his spell.

The thrill, even the titillation, of the book arises, of course, from the way its excitements rub up against the tightness of its strictures; and Hansen knows that eroticism is only as strong as the proscriptions against it, placing Mariette's abandon within the tight corset of the nuns' daily routine, and that within the larger confinements of the Calendar of Saints' feasts. Each section begins with a still life that makes the woman's convulsions the more tremendous by comparison. What Hansen also recognizes (as Baker does too, in a sense) is that there is nothing so erogenous as a small, dark space (the confessional, say), and that nothing is more exciting than mystery and prohibition. In an age when everything is made explicit and open, Hansen sees (as A. S. Byatt did in *Possession*) that there is nothing so daring as a chaste white bed. And in a world where anything is possible, the only way to set up tension is to recover a time when license was as difficult as abstinence. Sex, more than anything, shrivels at the prospect of naked exposure, and Hansen cunningly erects a net as surely as Baker, in some senses, plays with the net down.

The other great distinction of Hansen's book, which puts it in a different world from Baker's, is that it feels almost entirely like the product of the subconscious, of an imagination so possessed that a relatively young man from Santa Cruz, California is able to evoke the tensions of a seventeen-year-old postulant in a women's community eighty-five years ago. Baker, always conscious of his place in the literary firmament, congratulates himself on the new words he creates ("frans" for breasts and "strumming" for masturbation). Hansen, by contrast, is so much in the thrall of his vision that his language breaks through the barriers of convention: "Even in her eyes there is no travel," "Foot marries foot in the night's flooding cold," "Each tale I hear is a place I haven't been." The whole novel vibrates with a sense of language reborn; with fingers "drawling," with hair "all thrash and storm," and with the "haunting" of milk-white skin. It is also lit up by a poet's insistent rhythms, returning again and again to Mariette's "chocolate-brown hair," to the dressing and undressing of wounds, to the shock of red on white. Hansen has created a world so soaked and suffused with sensations – as in Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes" – that everything shivers with life, "choiring and starshine and trickling snow."

Best of all, for me, *Mariette in Ecstasy*, set amidst Romance-language codes and names, is a decidedly American book, bringing the French-

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sounding "Mariette" into the all-American state of "ecstasy." (America's trial and its hope is its closeness to ecstasy, its inability, really, to be "static.") Hansen is part of that American tradition which quivers with an intensity of belief and rapture, the strain of Miller and Melville rather than of Updike and Henry James. Without going into the ironies of how a young upstate New York writer like Baker (setting his book partly on the West Coast) is so highly popular, while a young West Coast writer like Hansen (setting his book in upstate New York) is relatively ignored, one need only say that Hansen is staking his claim in a world as close and equivocal as Emily Dickinson's, alive with the age-old American concerns of community and wildness, of sexual and spiritual immensities, of transcendence and its discontents. Hansen, with his intricately patterned literary text, teaches us about the world: Baker, with his avowedly post-literary book, merely reminds us of ourselves. Hansen has written a novel that takes us into the mysteries of the psalter. Baker has recorded a dialogue that simply ushers us into the back pages of a glossy magazine.

PICO IYER

Waking Dreams

WAKING. By Tom Sleigh. University of Chicago Press. $8.95.

IO AT NIGHT. By Laurie Sheck. Alfred A. Knopf. $9.95.

The supple and beautiful translated fragment from Canto 9 of Dante's *Purgatorio* that opens Tom Sleigh's second book, *Waking*, shows how at times we waken from our mortal slumber to discover the terrifying reality of our fate. Sleigh's translation finds Dante, near dawn, rapt in a "vision/ . . . almost divine" of "An eagle ready with golden feathers hovering/ In the air, its spread wings ready to swoop down." The vision, which Dante equates with the imagination's ability to create a sublime passage or ascension for the soul, competes with the workings of divine grace, for only by divine grace does a soul ascend the spheres of heaven. At the moment when Dante realizes the hubris of his imagination, he senses that he and the eagle, like Ganymede and Zeus, are burning "As a single flame, and that imagined blaze/ So singed me that it broke my slumber." Although Sleigh is not constrained by the theological constructs of the fourteenth-century Catholic Church, he finds that the incendiary consequence of the

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imagination's visions and dreams creates a friction point where desire and fear, as well as our wish for a life of passionate intensity, start their slow smolder.

The consequence of the "imagined blaze" is the subject of "Ending," a long, haunting dramatic monologue in which the speaker explains how his wish for some unbearable difficulty and suffering becomes, in the form of an incurable illness, not only true but the defining condition of his life. Sleigh writes, "What I wished for –/ that my life would be a hook and the hook a paradigm/ Of suffering I could not escape, suffering/ Whose knowledge would be impossible to bear/ Even as I braced and kept bracing/ To bear it – had been granted."

Like Dante, who dramatized his encounters with the inhabitants of the Christian afterlife, Sleigh, throughout *Waking*, allows the dead and the living of his own milieu to bear witness to their fate. These various accounts remind us of the "hook" and how it is seemingly granted to us by an irrepressible act of will. In the poem "M. on Her Thirtieth Birthday," a woman recalls her childhood desire for her parents' death and the eerie absence and freedom she felt one day, when her parents were out of the house, and she played the piano in a manner they would disapprove of: " – what I mean is that I was sure/ They would have punished me, just a lot of jangle,// No tune or anything to steer by . . ./ Now both of them are dead, Father ten years/ Mother twenty. I guess that's what it means to be/ Grown up, to know you wished them gone, and now they are."

The Larkinesque ending of this poem is typical of the chilling effects Sleigh is able to produce. He is a consummate stylist whose formal control and exploitation of convention is graceful and calm. And yet it is from the calm and steady control that some of Sleigh's most emotionally powerful moments are achieved. The chorus of the last stanza of "Don't Go to the Barn" warns Sleigh's mother of the dark psychic danger that waits for her not only in the barn but inside her own body, which has been "axed" by volts from electroshock therapy. Sleigh's formal characteristics remind me most of John Peck's in *Shagbark*, though Sleigh's are more emotionally and psychically revealing than Peck's poems.

Waking is one of the strongest collections of poems to appear in the last few years. The final poems, which deal directly with Sleigh's family, are, in my opinion, some of the best poems of the decade; in their intensity they echo Roethke's greenhouse poems. But perhaps where Sleigh is strongest is in his ability to see the implication of his poems to their end. The speaker in "Ending" arrives at a kind of acceptance and understanding of his illness, his fate, as he discovers a parallel for his life in a self-portrait by Bonnard: "was it fate to paint/ His own death," he writes, "his skill at seeing/ Turned on himself, his luck indistinguishable/ From his

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suffering?/ . . . that my luck/ Lay in my fate; that, before I became ill, my longing/ For a hook was, in fact, a kind of suffering . . ."

In *Io at Night*, Laurie Sheck locates us somewhere between the Garden of Eden and the Apocalypse. Io, who like Ganymede is visited by Zeus, represents our attempts to make sense of a world that is fragmented and imperfect, but whose wholeness and perfection seem attainable, either through one's memory of such a place, through the innocence of one's childhood, or through the promise of love. Io, then, is that person who asks in "Io," "Where is the girl who dreamed of being held? Where is the girl who felt as she walked into a stand/ Of narrow trees made white by frost (or did she dream?) –/ . . . that she would come, if she just kept walking long enough,/ to arms that would hold her and take her in?/ I remember and do not remember being her."

The condition of innocence preceding Io's seduction and transformation into a cow is what she remembers and, at the same time, cannot remember. But this uncertain state is what she believes to be perfection. What she cannot see, though the reader can, is how one form of her victimization is replaced by another, and so a darkness inheres even in our so-called memory of a wholeness or unity. The result, as she writes in "Io in the Wind Ongoing," is "There is no single world," or, in "The Basilica of San Francisco," only "the mangled beauty of the world." But Sheck's attempt to restore a wholeness is obsessive and tenacious, despite her yearning to accept the imperfection of our mortality on its own terms. In "To Io, Afterwards," she writes, "I suppose you are weary now of remembering,/ that being mortal you want to convince yourself you belong/ to this earth, and are anchored to the earth by love."

Although Sheck's overriding vision of humanity is characterized by pain and hurt, loss and grief, she finds respite in the hidden world, the realm of the unconscious, where dreams and the images of art originate. The cave paintings of Lascaux offer Sheck inklings of the prelapsarian world, where fear, hurt, shame and death do not exist. "In this cave of separateness," she writes in "The Red Cow at Lascaux," "in this animal/ silence, the cow leaps ceaselessly,/ its red skin blazing its bones./ It is not afraid. It is not afraid of human/ touch, or the movement of strangers." The cow which allows us to entertain a moment of innocence is, nevertheless, a victim of human imperfection, since it will be slaughtered, and ". . . like an unhealed/ wound, its red flesh goes on/ burning, its red flesh/ cannot stop burning."

For most of *Io at Night*, Io is an adequate figure of exiled wandering and bewilderment whose encounter with Prometheus is a portent of the worst kind of retributive enslavement. But at the end of the book, as if needing a figure more conclusively tragic than Io, who at last was colo-

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nized by Zeus, Sheck turns to Eurydice, whose escape from the underworld back to the world "with its power to maim" is foiled by Orpheus's inability to heed Hades's command. And so Eurydice, through no fault of her own, spends eternity remembering the moment she almost achieved: not paradise, but the earth, which, though "flawed," as Sheck tells us in "The Resurrection of the Body," is "more beautiful than anything/ and we have it for so brief a time."

Sheck, though primarily a narrative poet, can reach moments of lyrical intensity that remind us of Sylvia Plath. Here is such a moment from "The Madwoman in the Attic": "Here is my wedding gown, preserved like a mummy, all wrapped up for eternity./ What a fool I was then, standing like an igloo at the altar,/ and my hands two fish just plucked from their poles, ice-cold." And not since Plath has anyone used myth in such a potent way. At times one feels Sheck's reliance on myth is too automatic and reflexive, but even these moments she redeems, for always we hear behind the mask or persona of myth an individual, human voice, trying to make sense of her life which, at times, is overwhelmed by feelings of exile or abandonment. Sheck's *Io at Night* is a strong and compelling collection that has yet to receive the attention and recognition it deserves.

MICHAEL COLLIER

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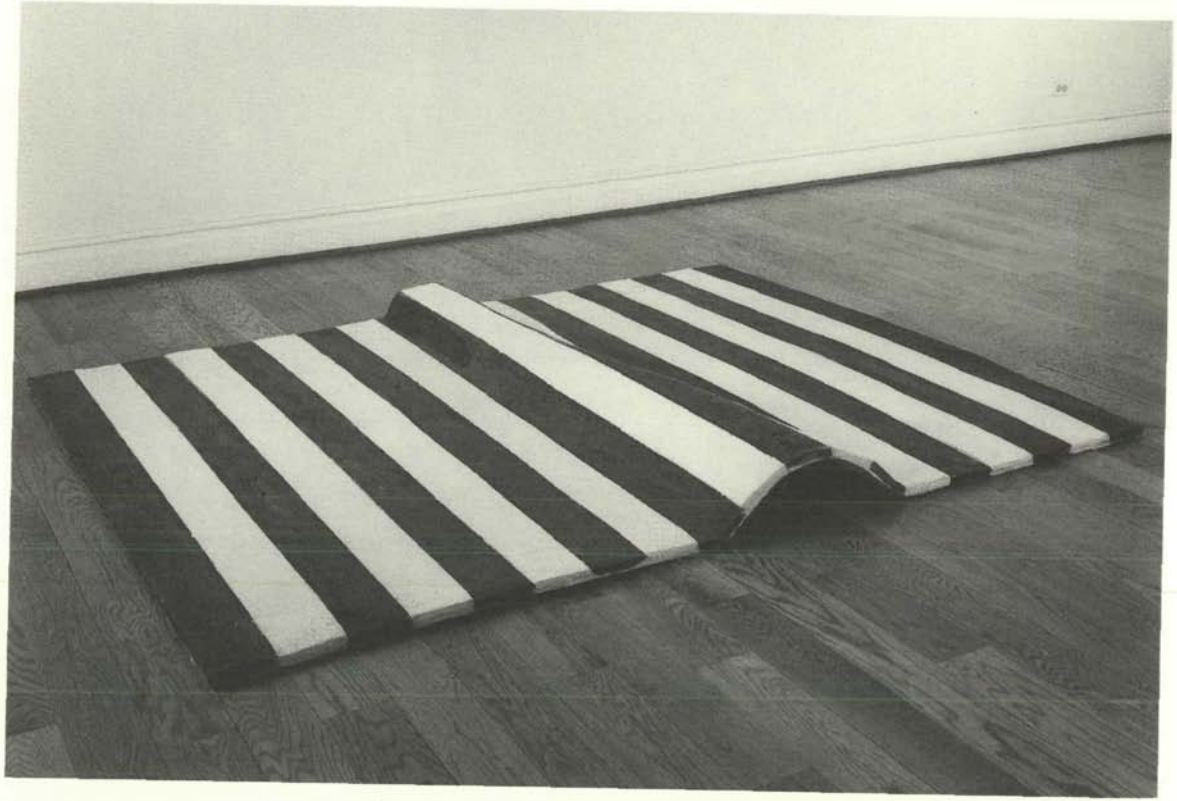

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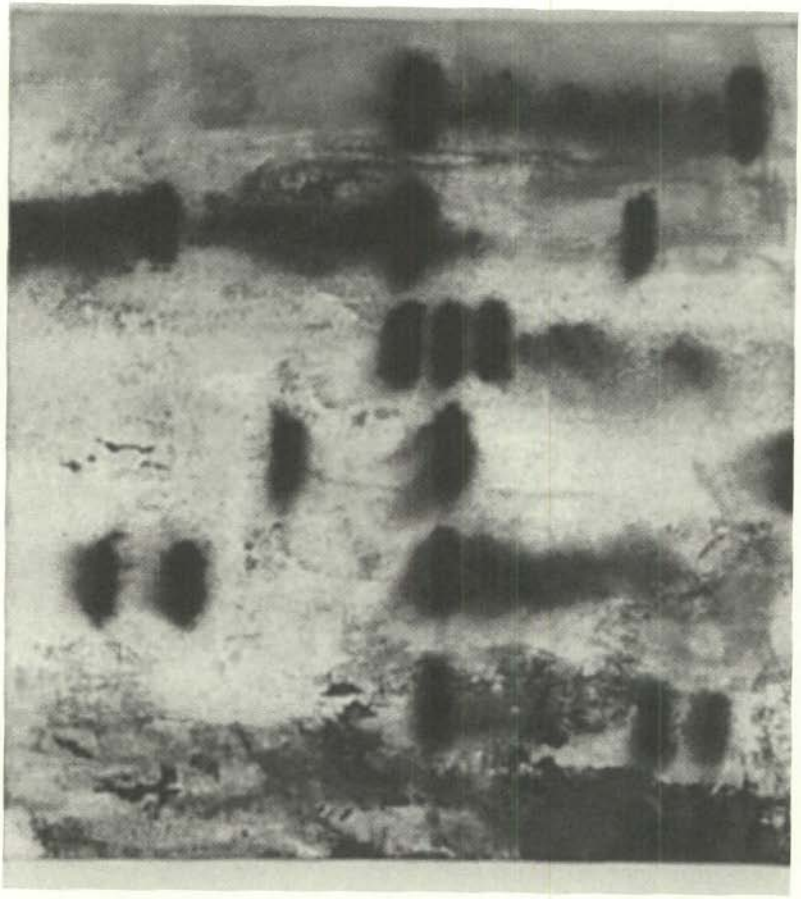

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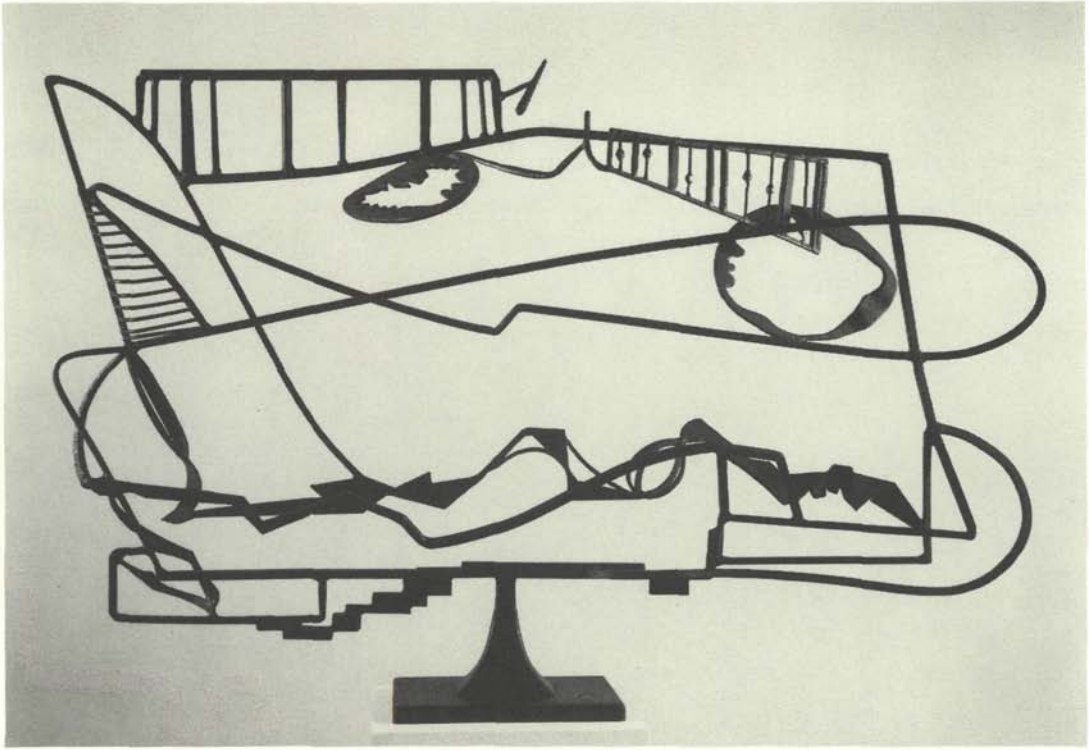

Hudson River Landscape (1951) by David Smith. Steel and stainless steel. 49 1/2 x 75 x 16 1/2 inches. Collection: The Whitney Museum of American Art. Photo Credit: Jerry L. Thompson. Courtesy of the Guggenheim Museum.

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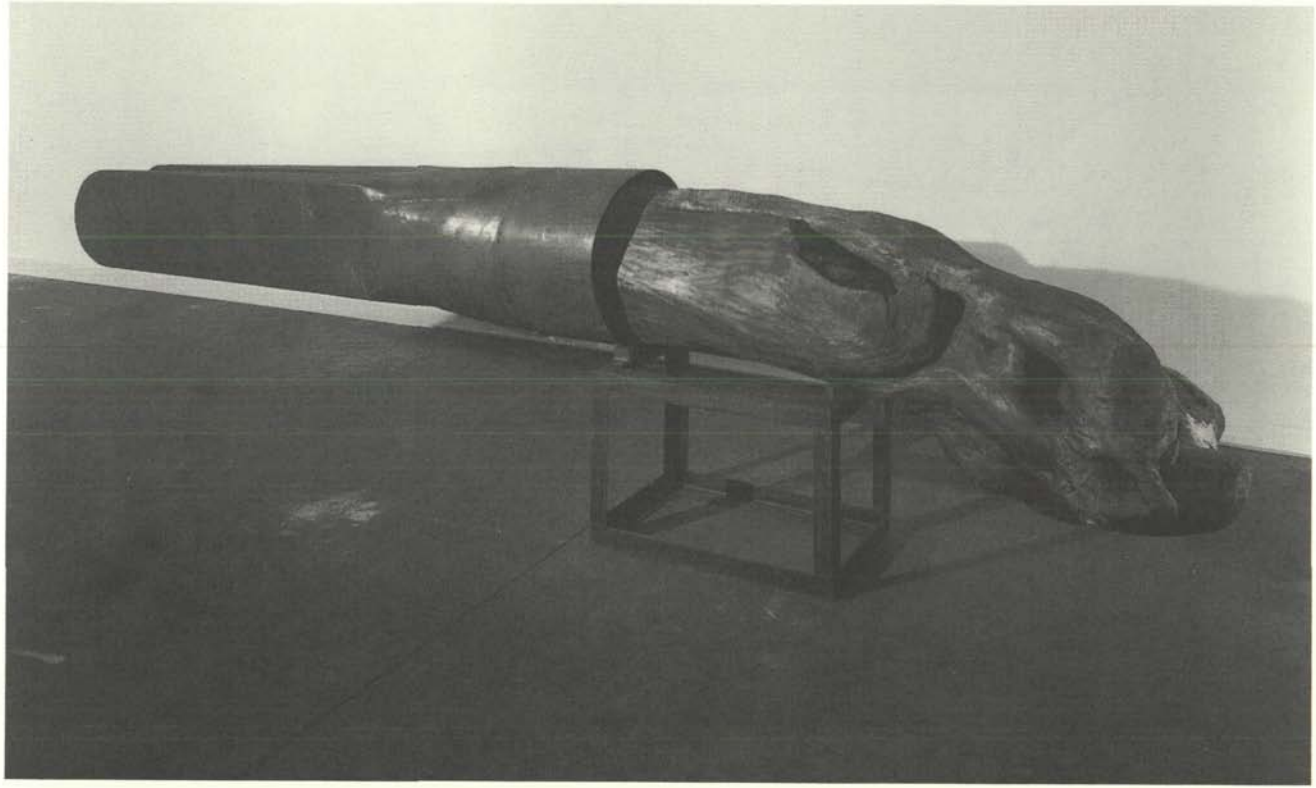

Ancestor (1989) by Magdalena Abakanowicz. Wood and steel. 59 x 248 x 39 inches. Private collection. Photo Credit: Dennis Cowley. Courtesy of Marlborough Gallery.

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Untitled (1992) by Joan Mitchell. Oil on canvas. 28¾ × 23½ inches. Photo Credit: Beth Phillips. The Estate of Joan Mitchell. Courtesy of Robert Miller Gallery.

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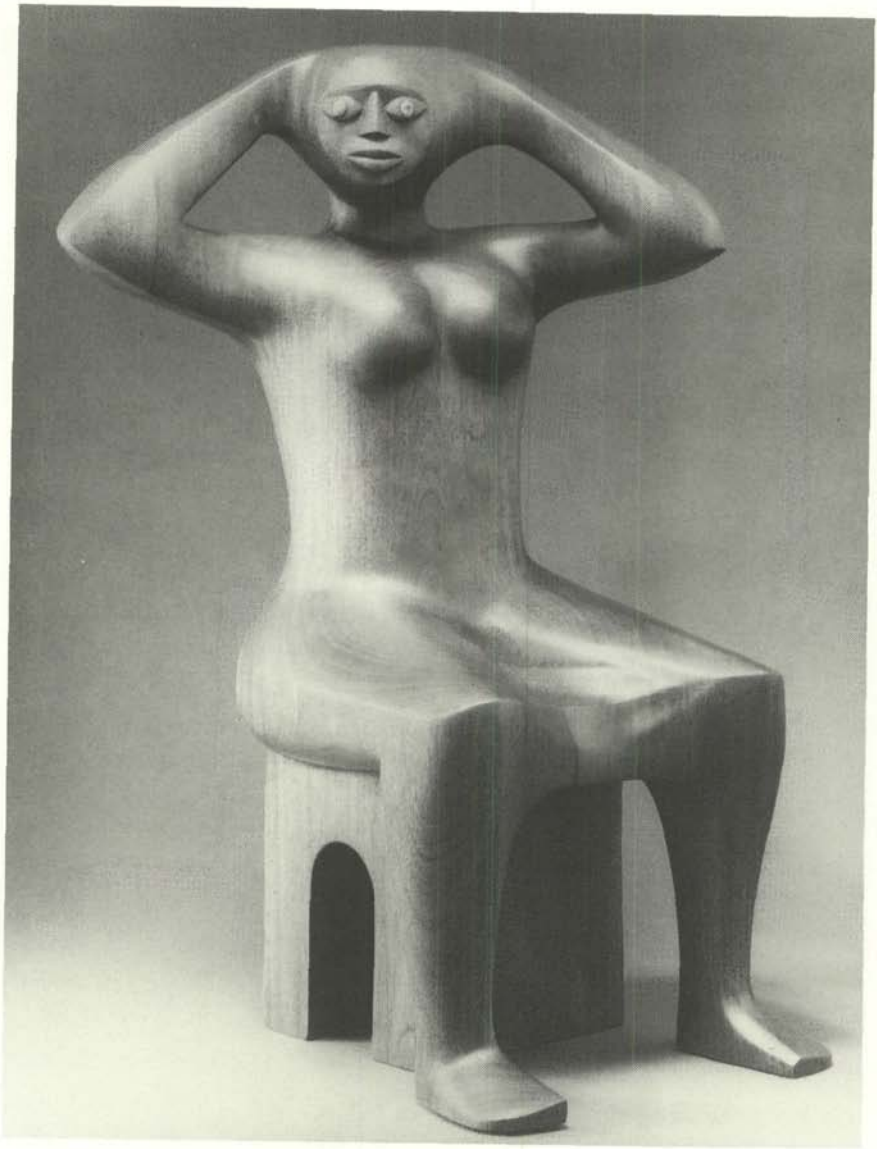

Woman Fixing Her Hair (1993) by Elizabeth Catlett. Wood. 28 × 19 × 15½ inches. Photo Credit: Manu Sassoonian. Courtesy of June Kelly Gallery.

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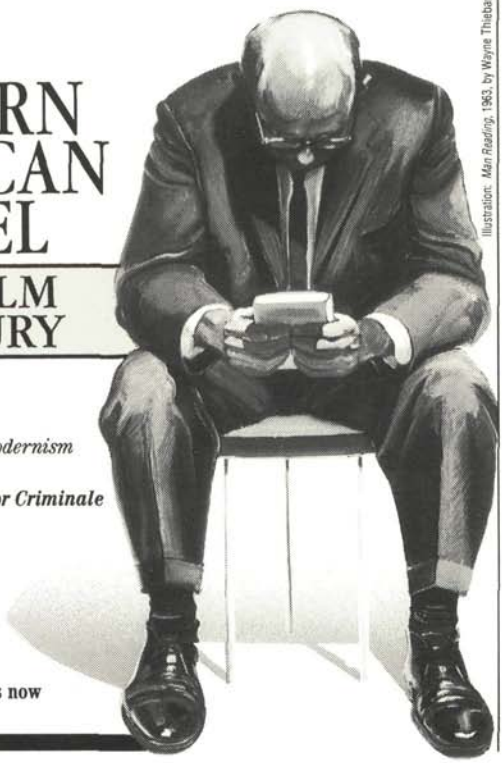

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